the weekly Standard

CHUCK GRASSLEY'S MOMENT
FRED BARNES

SEPTEMBER 3, 2018 • $5.99




# SWAMP THINGS

ANDREW FERGUSON • JACK GOLDSMITH
JOHN MCCORMACK • MICHAEL WARREN
on the downfall of Paul Manafort and Michael Cohen—and the fate of the man who hired them

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September 3, 2018 • Volume 23, Number 48




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# Hurtful Literal Existences

The Scrapbook picks on the *New York Times* quite a lot. Maybe too much. But it's hard not to. We so often find fatuous and preposterous material that we simply cannot help passing it along to our readers. One such item appeared in the August 16 edition of the paper—or so we thought. Headlined "Shedding the Cloak of White Guilt," it's an advice column by Cheryl Strayed and Steve Almond, hosts of a *Times* podcast called "Dear Sugars."

The person asking for advice—the letter is signed "Whitey"—appears to be a college student who has taken the absurdities of social-justice progressivism so seriously that he or she has almost gone insane. "Dear Sugars," the letter writer begins, "I'm riddled with shame. White shame. This isn't helpful to me or to anyone, especially people of color. I feel like there is no 'me' outside of my white/upper middle class/cisgender identity. I feel like my literal existence hurts people, like I'm always taking up space that should belong to someone else."

Like a postmodern Martin Luther, Whitey has followed all the dictates of multiculturalism but found no peace. "I research proper etiquette, read writers of color, vote in a way that will not harm P.O.C. [people of color] (and other vulnerable people). I engage in conversations about privilege with other white people. I take courses that will further educate me. I donated to Black Lives Matter." Yet unlike Luther's, Whitey's guilt remains.




The letter concludes with the confession that Whitey doesn't talk openly about all this because "making this conversation about me would be again centering whiteness. Yet bottling it up makes me feel an existential anger that I have a hard time channeling since I don't know my place. Instead of harnessing my privilege for greater good, I'm curled up in a ball of shame. How can I be more than my heritage?"

It's all too much. "My literal existence hurts people"? "Curled up in a ball of shame"? We conclude, optimistically, that Whitey is a parodist and a prankster.

Strayed and Almond, the *Times*'s advice-givers, don't take it that way. They reply with utmost gravity and at some length. "Shame and anger are powerful emotions, Whitey," Almond begins. "And yet your central struggle is around identity. You write that you don't know your place. In fact, your letter describes your place as a kind of prison cell of privilege. What you really feel is trapped within an identity that marks you, inescapably, as an oppressor." Strayed was rather hard on Whitey, too: "You don't have to relinquish your heritage to be an ally to people of color, Whitey. You have to relinquish your privilege."

Almond is an accomplished journalist but also a touch of a poser—he "resigned" from his post as adjunct professor of creative writing at Boston College after the school invited Condoleezza Rice as its commencement speaker. Strayed is the author of *Wild*, a 2012 bestseller about the author's self-discovery, and an outspoken feminist. Both are victims of a brilliant prank. Or at least we hope so. ♦

## Very Public Facilities

The French have made lots of important contributions to America. No one denies this. The Statue of Liberty. Lafayette. Tony Parker. French fries—though these were possibly ripped off from Belgium.

Now they have invented something we hope they'll keep to themselves: open-air urinals. Some sectors around Paris, it seems, are hotspots for public urination, and previous crackdowns haven't worked. So in a surrender worthy of Marshal Pétain, Parisian authorities installed red boxes filled with straw compost into which men can relieve themselves. The boxes, known as *uritrottoirs*, are being pitched as odor-free and environmentally friendly. Located in tourist areas—including one spot overlooking the River Seine near Notre Dame cathedral—they offer no privacy but at least have a flower box on top.




*Bonjour!* Uritrottoir-*ing by the Seine*

THOMAS SAMSON / AFP / GETTY

The new *pissoirs* are causing quite a brouhaha among Parisians. Some residents complain, with justification in our view, that they're unsightly. Others claim they're discriminatory—they cater only to men. Officials from the company that makes the urinals explain that owing to privacy concerns, "women need to be in a cabin,

so the aim is to free up existing toilets for them." They might also have pointed out that women aren't likely to be offenders in the first place, most having the decency not to relieve themselves in public.

And you thought Washington had a lot of leaks! (Sorry.) ♦

## V.S. Naipaul, 1932-2018

The death of Sir Vidia Naipaul on August 11 will generate plenty of retrospective monographs and essays, most of them rightly laudatory, some of them less so. Naipaul was born in Trinidad, the descendant of Indian immigrants. In his teens he won a government scholarship to study abroad, and he chose to matriculate at Oxford. His first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, was published in 1957 and well regarded by critics.

It was his fourth work of fiction, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, that made him justly famous. It's the story of Mohun Biswas, a young Indo-Trinidadian who yearns for a measure of autonomy and achieves it little by little—as a painter of signs, a shopkeeper, a reporter, and finally a civil servant with just enough income to build a house for himself and his family, away from his suffocating in-laws. *Biswas* is one of the great literary works of the 20th century, a masterpiece of understated prose and gentle realism that interweaves deep human affliction and madcap comedy.



*V.S. Naipaul*

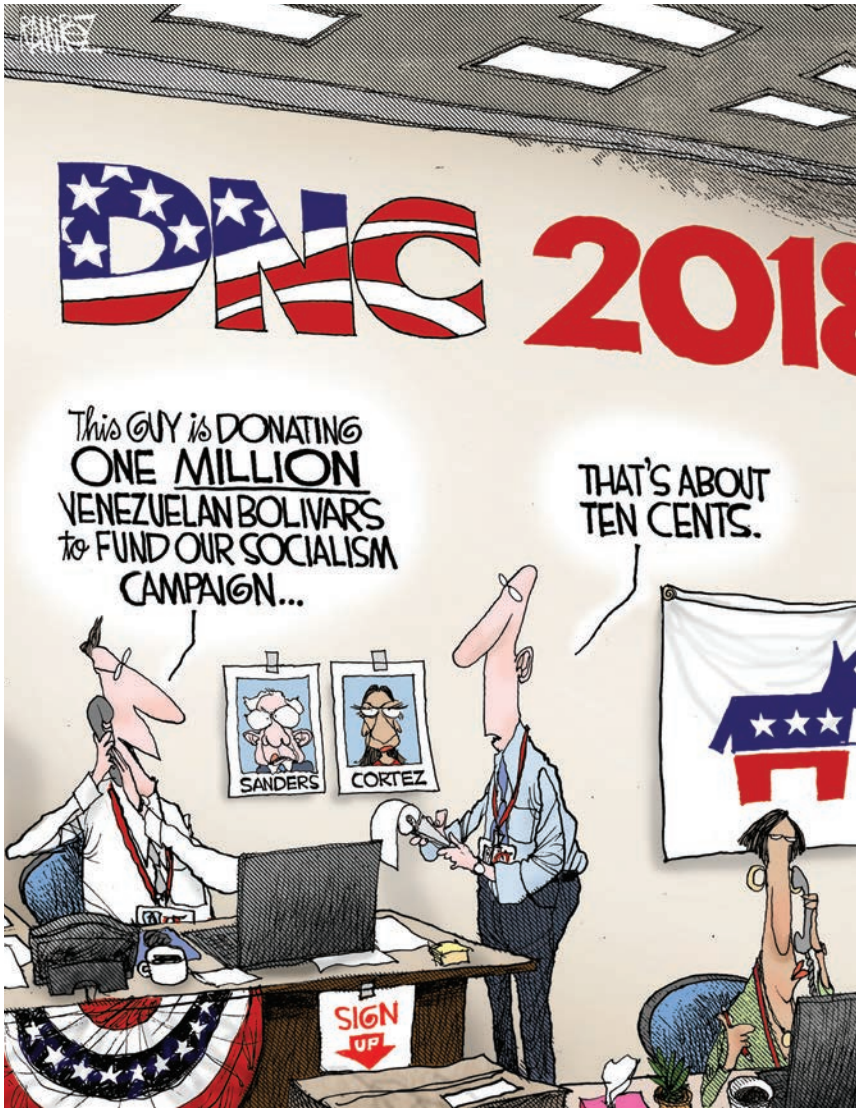
BARBARA ZANON / GETTY

Naipaul wrote many other superb works of fiction and nonfiction. We are especially fond of the novel *A Bend in the River* (1979), the travel book *A Turn in the South* (1989), *Among the Believers* (1981), about the explosion of Islamic extremism after the Iranian Revolution, and *The Writer and the World* (2002), a collection of his finest essays.

Naipaul received the Nobel Prize in 2001 and deserved it.

Academic critics have never cared much for Naipaul's fiction because he made no attempt to condemn the British empire or to portray indigenous cultures with nostalgia or undeserved sympathy. His prose is unpretentious; his plotting and themes avoid faux-literary knottiness. Naipaul's works attracted millions of grateful readers but few doctoral candidates.

Various associates accused him of cruelty and abusive behavior toward two wives and a lover. Others testified to the man's benevolence and good humor. He will be most often remembered, though, as a dizzyingly versatile writer who rarely allowed himself to publish a second-rate work—and one of a small group of Anglophone novelists in the second half of the 20th century who can genuinely be called great. ♦



## Sentences We Didn't Finish

'The young poets who stand out have helped make race and sexuality and gender the red-hot centers of current poetry, and they push



past as many boundaries as they can. They strain to think anew about selfhood and group membership. Drawing on eclectic traditions, they mine the complexity latent in the lyric 'I.' At its best . . ." ("How Poetry Came to Matter Again," Jesse Lichtenstein, the *Atlantic*, September 2018.) ♦

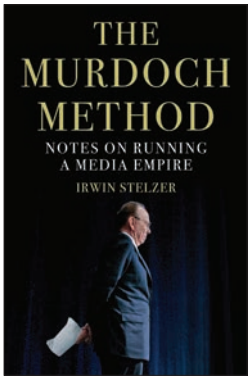
## Must Reading

The Scrapbook spent its August break last week tuning out the news and turning to a pile of books we've been meaning to read—from the old (Charles Portis's *The Dog of the South* and *Gringos*, which we enthusiastically and unreservedly recommend) to the new, our friend Irwin Stelzer's fascinating peek behind the corporate curtain, *The Murdoch Method*.

We have an interest to declare as regards the latter; Irwin has been a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard since its early days, and Rupert was the (very generous) proprietor of this magazine from its founding until 2009. The two men met in 1978, and Irwin quickly became a trusted kibitzer and consultant. So he had a ringside seat for more than three decades as the newspaperman from Adelaide, Australia, built a global media colossus. And the central issue he explores is compelling: Was that dazzling entrepreneurial achievement owed only to Murdoch's risk-taking panache and intuition, or was there, as Irwin contends, a method behind the astonishingly successful Murdochian improvisations?

Among the issues that arose during Irwin's years consulting with Murdoch were:

- the financial crisis resulting from Sky's expensive challenge to the BBC, beneficiary of some £3.7 billion in guaranteed income from the license fee, which BBC supporters claim "is not just another tax. It is a payment for a service," although payment is due even if you never use the "service" by watching BBC channels;
- the struggle to get Fox News onto the key New York City cable system to challenge the dominant liberal broadcast networks and cable news channel CNN;
- his twenty-year stalking of the *Wall Street Journal*;
- a campaign in the *New York Times* aimed at upending his effort to purchase the *Wall Street Journal*;
- he day he had to tell his mother that he would seek American citizenship so that he would be eligible to meet government regulations concerning ownership of television stations.




As that last item suggests, *The Murdoch Method* is, if not exactly gossipy, an engrossing, chatty, insider's account—a great read about the greatest media empire of the late-20th and early-21st century. Readers will be especially grateful that Irwin's agreement with Murdoch, amazingly in a day when non-disclosure agreements are all the rage, gave him "complete freedom, with no confidentiality agreement, to write this book." We hope our friendship will survive our noting that Irwin writes so surpassingly well, you would never guess he is also an eminent economist. ♦

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The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except one week in March, one week in June, one week in August, and one week in December) at 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-274-7293. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-386-597-4378 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $5.99. Back issues, $5.99 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Copyright 2018, Clarity Media Group. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a registered trademark of Clarity Media Group.

BPA WORLDWIDE

# The Dell Ate My Homework

In 1984 the administrators of my public school—I was in seventh grade—thought it would be a terrific idea if students were instructed in computers. The school had purchased a small roomful of these bulky machines—Commodore 64s, if I remember—and we were made to sit in front of them and tap out commands and listen to a nice man named Mr. Reed explain terms like "prompt" and "disk operating system." It was a total waste of time and resources, but in 1984 it felt strange and important. Mr. Reed kept telling us that "in the future, everything will be done by computers, and if you don't know how to use them, you'll be left behind."

My daughters returned to school this week, and I am reminded that the fear of a computerized future still haunts public education. These days, of course, students aren't made to take classes on "computers," if that's still the term. They're issued laptops.

When my oldest first brought home her laptop, I had questions. Why, I wondered, must we spend so much time and money getting kids to learn applications that will be replaced by others in a few years? In an age when nearly everybody laments our kids' addiction to pixelated screens, why are we encouraging the addiction earlier than it might begin otherwise? I try very hard to avoid becoming the anti-technology crank dad who blathers on about how we didn't have all these gadgets in my day. Really—I do. But in the six years since my oldest daughter brought home her first Dell, these machines have perplexed and provoked me to the point of despair.

When the schools first started handing them out, district officials told us how efficient and convenient these computers would make everything. And maybe that was true—for them. It's not true for students and parents. The burden of keeping up with these beastly things is an endless source of woe. The laptops must be recharged, and school officials insist that they be recharged at home, not at school. Fair enough. Teachers don't want kids fighting over outlets and losing charging cords. But what if you forget to remind your child to charge her laptop and it's time to go to school and the battery is at 4 percent? Your morning becomes a tragic scene of weeping and recrimination, that's what.



BRITT SPENCER

The sheer weight of the things is a nuisance, too. One of the original reasons for issuing laptops to schoolchildren was that it would make all those weighty textbooks unnecessary. In practice, most of the textbooks are still necessary, as are the notebooks and pens and pencils associated with former stages of human development. The result is that my daughters' backpacks are four or five pounds heavier than the ordinary book-laden backpack. I'm a strong guy, but these girls' bags feel like a Marine's battle gear. Last year my middle daughter experienced persistent neck pain that nearly stopped her from playing the violin.

The girls tell me that games are—air quotes—"prohibited" on their laptops. But most of the students know how to get around the blocks and look at whatever they want to online. I'm told on good authority that kids play supposedly proscribed games and read celebrity news in class. If I were the father of boys, which I am not, I would worry less about games and celeb news than, let's say, other things.

Laptops are also prone to a host of vulnerabilities that never afflicted notebooks and pens. They malfunction, they get viruses, they're stolen, their screens crack when they're dropped, they lose keys on the keypad. When that happens the student has to enter the complicated and time-consuming process of having them repaired or replaced.

Then there's the problem of transmission. Students these days mostly don't turn in their homework by bringing papers to class—so primitive! They upload it the night before. That word "upload" sounds easy and efficient, but so many things go wrong. The Internet goes down just as the midnight deadline passes, a crucial password suddenly doesn't work, the upload doesn't "take" somehow and the teacher never receives it. It's as if that mythical dog that used to get blamed for eating kids' homework has sprung to life online and roams the world devouring the stuff.

It's still unclear to me why our local district spends gobs of allegedly precious state money on machines that cause vastly more problems than they solve. Usually these decisions are born of bureaucratic envy—the neighboring district got them so we have to get them, too. So it goes. At least my kids won't be left behind.

**Barton Swaim**

the weekly Standard



*With friends like these: Turkey's Erdogan flanked by Iran's Hassan Rouhani and Russia's Vladimir Putin in Ankara this April*

# Ankara the Adversary

Almost two years ago, the American minister Andrew Brunson was taken hostage by the Turkish government. The charges against him—"political or military espionage" and "support for a terrorist group"—are absurd. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants the Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen extradited from the United States—he holds a paranoid grudge against Gülen, whom he blames for a coup attempt in 2016—and erroneously thought the United States would trade Gülen for Brunson.

President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have both paid attention to the case. The president tweeted in April: "Pastor Andrew Brunson, a fine gentleman and Christian leader in the United States, is on trial and being persecuted in Turkey for no reason. They call him a Spy, but I am more a Spy than he is. Hopefully he will be allowed to come home to his beautiful family where he belongs!" Pence followed up in July by threatening sanctions against the Turkish entities relevant to Brunson's detention.

Pence's comments helped drive the Turkish lira down by nearly 5 percent, but the Erdogan government has remained recalcitrant. In response, the Treasury Department imposed Magnitsky Act sanctions on two Turkish officials, Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gul and Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu.

That we are sanctioning the citizens of a fellow NATO member is regrettable, but Turkey under Erdogan is far closer to an adversary than an ally. Indeed, the country remains a member of NATO mainly because there is no mechanism for ejection. It was Erdogan's Turkey, remember, that gave refuge to the Hamas terrorist Saleh al-Arouri in 2012. Turkey continues to purchase Iranian oil despite U.S. sanctions. The Turks have detained other U.S. citizens, too: the NASA physicist and dual U.S.-Turkish citizen Serkan Golge, for instance.

The United States has often cultivated Turkish favor in the past, partly because it's a member of NATO, but more importantly because of the strategic air base at Incirlik. Department of Defense leaders are reportedly considering alternative bases in Romania and Jordan. Other possibilities include Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates.

Freeing U.S. military operations from dependence on Incirlik won't be easy—American nuclear weapons may be stored there—but it would allow greater freedom to pursue regional objectives. For now, though, the most effective weapons are economic. Erdogan blames his country's faltering economy on (who else?) the United States. His top political ally, Burhan Kuzu, accuses "Jewish banking families." But Turkey's economic woes have mainly to do with domestic policymaking, especially Erdogan's bewildering monetary policy. Credit agencies were downgrading Turkish debt and investors fleeing well before sanctions became an issue.

RASIT AYDOGAN / ANADOLU AGENCY / GETTY

Whatever the cause, the country is now particularly vulnerable to U.S. sanctions, and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin signaled last week that his department will impose more if Turkey continues to refuse to release Brunson. The threat of sanctions can pack as much punch as sanctions themselves in the global economy.

The United States has accused Turkey's state-owned bank, HalkBank, of circumventing sanctions on Iran, which could result in a fine of tens of billions of dollars. HalkBank's Mehmet Hakan Atilla was sentenced to 32 months in prison for his part in the conspiracy in May. Reza Zarrab, a Turkish gold trader, pleaded guilty to the same charges.

Erdogan seems to think he can use Brunson as a trading chip to avoid monetary punishment. Last month, he asked Trump to persuade the Israelis to release Ebru Ozkan, a Turkish woman alleged to have funneled money to Hamas. Trump obliged, and the Israelis released her. The president believed the Turks would release Brunson as an act of reciprocal goodwill, but they only moved him from prison to house arrest. Trump has, rightly, had enough. On August 20, he said flatly that there would be no further concessions.

Germany, France, and Britain are open to a policy of isolating NATO's hostage-taking bad actor. The danger, of course, is that Turkey will move closer to Russia, but that has already begun to happen irrespective of U.S. sanctions—arms and energy deals between Ankara and Moscow have been in the works for years. There's little point in placating an ally if the ally is behaving like an enemy. ♦

# Well Done, Wyoming

The primary election victory for Wyoming's Mark Gordon on August 21 was widely interpreted as a defeat for Donald Trump. And it was—just not in the sense the pundits thought.

The victor in the GOP gubernatorial primary was Wyoming rancher and state treasurer Mark Gordon. His chief opponent in the six-man race was the 78-year-old multimillionaire investor and Republican megadonor Foster Friess. "Go VOTE TODAY for Foster Friess," the president tweeted on Election Day. "He will be a fantastic Governor! Strong on Crime, Borders & 2nd Amendment. Loves our Military & our Vets. He has my complete and total Endorsement!"

It wasn't enough. Gordon took 33 percent to Friess's 26 percent.

Our guess is that Wyoming Republicans didn't plump for Gordon over Friess as any sign of their displeasure with Trump—in 2016, he won the state by a massive 46 points. We suspect, rather, that they simply considered the presidential endorsement irrelevant.

Wyoming's gubernatorial candidates spent the campaign debating questions of primary importance to residents—the budget, the use of public land, the education system, and state regulation. Little was said about federal immigration laws or kneeling NFL players. The fact that Friess is known mainly as a national political funder—his super-PAC financed Rick Santorum's 2012 presidential run, for instance—didn't seem to help his candidacy. Voters backed a Johnson County native over the Wisconsin-born and only part-time Wyomingite Friess.

Asked why he thought the president's endorsement seemed to make so little difference, Gordon remarked, "This is a governor's race. This is about the state of Wyoming." Precisely. If only more regional races were about things other than Donald Trump and the culture wars.

Wyoming's gubernatorial primary encourages us for another reason. It's proof—if indeed proof is still needed—that money doesn't buy elections in this country. We're not suggesting that Friess wanted to spend his way into the governor's mansion, but that's how many of our left-liberal friends would have explained his victory if he had won. Friess's campaign account took in $2.5 million, as against Gordon's $2 million—but $2.2 million of Friess's money was his own. Gordon had to borrow $1.5 million and spent virtually nothing of his own.

For years, a chorus of political scientists, left-wing commentators, and Democratic officeholders have alleged that the uber-wealthy are buying elections. Since the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision, which defined spending on political causes as a form of protected speech and so allowed private individuals to spend as much as they liked to promote their favored candidates, many American liberals have adopted what can fairly be termed a conspiratorial outlook on U.S. elections. Harry Reid relentlessly accused Charles and David Koch of using their billions to corrupt our democracy. Jane Mayer alleged the same about the Kochs, Richard Mellon Scaife, the Coors family, and many others in her 2016 book *Dark Money*. And yet the evidence never seems to cooperate: The Kochs' candidate lost in 2012, and Donald Trump spent far less in 2016 than Hillary Clinton.

And this week we learned that one of the nation's best-known megadonors couldn't get himself elected governor of America's least populous state. We mean no disrespect to Friess when we say: Well done, Wyoming. ♦

ANDREW FERGUSON

# The Evolution of Michael Cohen

I'm not dropping a heavy hint to book publishers when I say I've been daydreaming this week about what it would be like to ghostwrite Michael Cohen's inevitable memoir, set to appear—I'm guessing—in the fall of 2020.

Cohen doesn't look or sound like someone at home with the printed word, but neither does his former boss, who claims to have written, if not read, more than a dozen books. Like Donald Trump, he will need a hack in the back room to shape his memories and observations into full sentences. I see Cohen's book as more personal and reflective than Trump's *The Art of the Deal* or *Think BIG and Kick Ass*. I see a book with a softer focus, something intimate and shareable, a worthy addition to the grand tradition of American publishing: *From Stooge to Stoolie: How I Learned to Live Again, Laugh Again, and Love Again—and How You Can Too*. The jacket photo will feature a pastel sweater draped casually over the shoulders of the nominal author, covering his prison jumpsuit.



**The story is being spun by an unavoidable man named Lanny Davis, whom Cohen rescued from the Washington slagheap and hired to play his attorney on TV.**

The evolution of Michael Cohen is now an accepted thing—we all know, or are supposed to know, that over the last year, or even longer, Cohen was transformed from one kind of guy into another. The story is being spun by an unavoidable man named Lanny Davis, whom Cohen rescued from the Washington slagheap and hired to play his attorney on TV. Davis describes a tale of penance and rebirth, a slow journey from darkness to light. "He made a turn," Davis told PBS's Judy Woodruff, who seemed to be buying it, "after serving Mr. Trump and doing a lot of things he's not so proud of."

Anyone who has savored the countless profiles that have been written about Cohen or has seen him defending his old boss on TV—seen the large forehead and the jutting jaw, the eyebrows always raised and the mouth half open to facilitate breathing—will be surprised to hear that he was spiritual-awakening material. In his press coverage he comes off as a Hollywood stock figure—a goon, an errand boy, a lackey, a henchman: Think of Henry Hill in *Goodfellas* or the less fortunate Luca Brasi in *The Godfather*. The difference is that nowadays, to find work as a lackey, you need a law degree.

Cohen got his from Cooley Law School—not to be confused with Cooley High, but close. Cooley became instantly famous among the political class when the Washington tip sheet *Politico* discovered that Cooley was once listed as the least selective law school in the country. Cohen wasn't training to be a professor of torts at Yale, however. He was a guy from Queens, chasing ambulances in search of clients and flipping condos in Manhattan and Jersey City, until he met the ultimate guy from Queens.

It was real estate, what else, that brought them together. Cohen's friendship with Trump began with an act of sycophancy. In 2006 Trump levied a huge assessment on the tenants of one of his buildings, where Cohen himself lived. The tenants organized a rebellion, refusing to pay. Lawsuits followed, as they do with Trump. Cohen took Trump's side in the dispute, lobbying and cajoling his neighbors, representing him at meetings of the condo association. Cohen happily accepted a large increase in his own building fees for a place just a pace behind the man who didn't write *The Art of the Deal*, which is not only Trump's favorite book but Cohen's as well. He bought several more Trump properties.

"Once some buyers go Trump, they never go back," wrote the *New York Post* in 2007, in a piece describing the many apartments Cohen owned in Trump buildings. "Trump properties are solid investments," Cohen told the *Post*. "He's a very smart person," Trump replied.

Trump hired Cohen as a vice president in his company, and Cohen worked his way to a point where he could plausibly describe himself as Trump's personal lawyer. These were the dark years. He became notorious in New York for his belligerent defenses of Trump, calling reporters, rivals, and litigants and dropping F-bombs as if he were flying over Dresden. One story seems to sum up the Trump-Cohen relationship. (It originated in a *Wall Street Journal* profile and has become a staple of the Cohen literature.) Trump agreed, with obvious reluctance, to come to the bar mitzvah of Cohen's son. Trump arrived late, then gave a speech describing the extraordinary efforts that Cohen and his family had made to get him to come to the ceremony. Cohen beamed. Thank you, sir, may I have another?

Cohen's salary at the Trump organization was $400,000 a year, but he found other ways to make money. He is

LIKENESSES: DAVE CLEGG

a man of many talents, spying opportunity everywhere. According to his plea agreement, Cohen even brokered the sale of . . . fancy handbags. One transaction involving a Birkin bag (by Hermès) brought him a $30,000 fee. Other income came from millions of dollars' worth of taxi medallions, which he leased to taxi operators in New York and Chicago. Cohen found he could make as much money from the operators as from the medallions. One operator, for instance, asked Cohen for a loan of $2 million. Cohen opened a personal line of credit at 5 percent interest. Then he loaned the money to his friend at 12 percent interest. With Cohen's encouragement the loan grew to $6 million, generating what even New York lawyers call "real money."

But Cohen was more often a borrower than a lender. In time his life became a dizzying carousel of bank debt. He drew money from one bank to pay off enough of the loan from another so he could lie about both to get more loans from a third. In the whirlwind the payoffs to Stormy Daniels and Karen McDougal must have seemed a nuisance, redeemed only by the fact that they illustrated his indispensability to "Mr. Trump." "I'd take a bullet for him," Cohen famously said. Trump—also famously—didn't reciprocate Cohen's affection, and when the president-elect declined to give him a job in his new administration, Cohen's journey from darkness to light began.

The journey's pace picked up considerably this April, when FBI agents raided his office and home. Snooping through millions of files found in drawers and on hard drives, prosecutors discovered he hadn't paid taxes on his profitable dealings with taxi drivers and handbag collectors. The open-and-shut cases of tax evasion were the leverage prosecutors used to force Cohen to turn on Trump.

Of course, in Lanny Davis's narrative, no force was necessary, beyond the lure of virtue, which is its own reward. As spring turned to summer, Cohen began to see Trump for what he was, Davis says. While FBI agents rummaged through his life in hopes of destroying it, Cohen was repelled by Trump's continued attacks on FBI agents. "I respect the FBI as an institution, as well as their agents," Cohen told ABC in his only post-conversion interview. "When they searched my hotel room and my home . . . the agents were respectful, courteous, and professional. I thanked them for their service and as they left, we shook hands." (Thank you, sir, may I have another?)

Then came Helsinki. Cohen watched Trump's press conference with Vladimir Putin. "After Helsinki," Davis told the *Today* show, Cohen "worried about the future of our country with somebody who was aligning himself with Mr. Putin. . . .

"That's the kind of thing that caused Michael Cohen to change his mind and decide to dedicate himself to telling the truth to the American people."

Moved by patriotism, embraced by family, the journey of Michael Cohen from stooge to stoolie is now complete. You don't have to believe it, but as a book it'll make bank. ♦

COMMENT ♦ STEPHEN F. HAYES

# Rand Paul goes to Moscow

Senator Rand Paul has been making the rounds in recent days touting deeper U.S. engagement with Vladimir Putin's Russia. When Paul talks about foreign policy, his pronouncements are often a curious admixture of odd conspiracy theories, pacifist banalities, and ahistorical analogies—all delivered with the confident condescension of someone who doesn't have any idea what he's talking about.

So it is with Paul's lonely effort to provide intellectual backing for Donald Trump's instinctive desire to make nice with the increasingly provocative regime run by the anti-American former KGB agent. Examples of Paul's foolishness are legion, but the most revealing came in an interview that the senator granted on August 16 with *The Liberty Report*, an Internet television show hosted by his father, libertarian gadfly and former congressman Ron Paul.

Senator Paul has lately made a cause of conciliation by concession—seeking to reverse sanctions on Russian lawmakers, blocking proposed sanctions on Russian oil interests, and, more broadly, preventing punitive measures against Putin's Russia in favor of dialogue and conversation. These efforts build on his past work downplaying Putin's aggression and attacking those who highlight it.

In late February 2014, with Russian troops on "high alert" and amassed on the border with Ukraine, Paul spoke out not against the Russian strongman who'd put them there, but against conservatives who warned about Putin's expansionism and the possibility of an imminent invasion. "Some on our side are so stuck in the Cold War era that they want to tweak Russia all the time, and I don't think that is a good idea," he said. For good measure, he echoed Russian propaganda messaging at the time, saying that "Ukraine has a long history of being, you know, either part of the Soviet Union or within that sphere—



**When the senator talks about foreign policy, his pronouncements are often a curious admixture of odd conspiracy theories, pacifist banalities, and ahistorical analogies.**

common language, et cetera, so I don't think it behooves us to tell the Ukraine what to do."

Is it any wonder, then, that he was welcomed with open arms by Putin's allies on his recent trip to Russia? Not really. But Paul nonetheless sounded surprised when he told his father that he'd been "lucky enough to get meetings" with Russian lawmakers. Paul reported that he found Russian legislators "are more open to dialogue and do want to meet and want better relations with the United States." He told his father that his travels in Russia made clear to him that while most Russians today might not find things perfect, they prefer life under Putin to the old Soviet Union and to the "difficult time" of the "crazy, Wild West" 1990s that followed the dissolution of the Soviet bloc.

Senator Paul recounted for his father a meeting he'd had with the head of the Libertarian party of Russia, who, the younger Paul reported, "has been getting crowds of 10-, 20-, 30,000 people to show up" to hear the libertarian message in Russia. "It's not perfect, he's not allowed on the ballot," Paul said, but "at least he was able to speak with us while we were there."

"It's not perfect" might qualify as an understatement, as Putin's government routinely targets for assassination, at home and abroad, his political opponents, real and perceived. Maybe such understatement is part of Paul's determined effort to avoid tweaking Russia all the time.

Paul acknowledges that Russia "probably" interfered with the 2016 presidential election, but he downplays the meddling as inconsequential. "Do I think that they probably hacked into Hillary Clinton's emails?" asks Kentucky's junior senator. "Yes. But they are never, ever going to admit to that. But if I were to weigh hacking into Hillary Clinton's emails with nuclear war, they sort of pale in comparison."

Either we let Russia's hacking slide or we have nuclear war. It's the kind of logic that leads to arguments like the one Paul offers as a follow-up.

In rapid succession, the senator says that (a) sanctions on Russia haven't done any good and poison relations, (b) the reaction to Russian meddling in our elections, including the sanctions, have made clear to them that their continued meddling in our elections would harm U.S.-Russia relations, and (c) sanctions on Russia will have the opposite of their intended effect.

"You can try to put sanctions on Russia and punish them, but their response is to become more firm in their resolve not to do something," Paul explained. "Like election meddling: In all likelihood, yes, Russia probably did hack into Hillary Clinton's emails. I don't think they expected the reaction in our country or how big a deal it would become. But I think they're seeing now that if they did this, it's backfired on them."

Why have they come to this conclusion? In large part because of U.S. sanctions and other punitive measures.

"They've got worse relations, worse dialogue, less trade, more sanctions—and so I think it's important for Russia to understand what's going on in our country, and I think some of it is hysteria in our country, in order for them to decide because countries that have the ability to spy will continue to spy and countries that have the ability to hack into computers will continue to do this. What we need to do is to make sure they understand that if they want better relations that it's not in their best interest. . . . They're annoyed with the sanctions, but they'll actually resist change more because of the sanctions."

In short: Sanctions don't work, sanctions have worked here, but sanctions won't work in the future.

If logic isn't Paul's strength, neither is history. In arguing for leniency on Putin's Russia, Paul invoked Ronald Reagan's nuclear talks with Mikhail Gorbachev, whom he met during his recent visit. Trump needs to buck the remnants of Cold War orthodoxy if he's to have any hope

## **Worth Repeating** from ***WeeklyStandard.com:***

Let's consider Donohue's response to the Pennsylvania grand jury's report on sex abuse and its cover-up in the local dioceses. When it exploded last week, Donohue was quick to issue a report of his own. He gave it the grandiose and self-congratulatory title "Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report Debunked." As always, from the first sentence of the first paragraph, his technique is: Dukes Up! . . .

Donohue, under the myth-fact format, goes on to offer a word salad of misdirection, overstatement, special pleading, and distinctions without a difference—exactly the kind of sleight of hand he finds in the grand jury report.

For example, you have heard that it was said, "The priests were found guilty of preying on youngsters."

But Donohue says unto you: "No one was found guilty of anything."

You have heard that it was said, "All of the accused are priests."

But Donohue says unto you: It is "wrong to say that all of the accused are *priests*. In fact, some were brothers, some were deacons, and some were seminarians."

*—Andrew Ferguson, 'With Friends Like Bill Donohue …'*

of forging better relations with Russia, Paul argues. This means rejecting the kind of punitive measures favored by the hawks in both political parties. And it means ignoring the kinds of criticism that Ronald Reagan got for his meetings with Mikhail Gorbachev. To make his point, Paul turns to his favorite villain: the neocons.

"For Reagan and Gorbachev to come together, Reagan had to defy some neoconservative criticism, the Bill Kristols and a whole, you know, ah, group of the neoconservatives that criticized Reagan for talking to Gorbachev. Reagan had to rise above that, rise out of the orthodoxy of the Cold War and meet with Gorbachev."

Set aside the rather significant fact that no one was more responsible for the "orthodoxy of the Cold War" than Ronald Reagan. Ignore the fact that the Cold War "orthodoxy" Paul rejects—the kind of confrontational rhetoric Reagan preferred and the aggressive anti-Communist policies that defined his foreign policy—gave the United States precisely those advantages that allowed diplomacy to succeed. And focus instead on Bill Kristol.

Bill Kristol wasn't leading criticism of Ronald Reagan's foreign policy in the 1980s. He was working in Reagan's administration. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

# The Erdogan question: Is it time to shrink NATO?

There was once a country in what used to be called the Near East that was much admired in the United States and often regarded as America's most valuable asset in the region.

Although the country was predominantly Muslim, its government was resolutely secular in outlook and committed to "modernizing" its deeply traditional culture: Women enjoyed unprecedented equality, for example, and nearby Israel was a strategic ally. Located on the southern edge of the Russian/Soviet empire, it served as an essential buffer between Moscow and the oil-rich Arab kingdoms—a genuine East/West crossroads—and its diplomats and soldiers developed deep relationships with their Western counterparts.



Of course, the place that I am describing is Iran, or was until 1979, but this might just as easily apply to Turkey.

I should mention, at this juncture, that I am one who believes that the rise of Turkey's autocratic, Islamist president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has prompted American journalists and statesmen to romanticize our modern relations with the Turkish state. Or to paraphrase Governor Cuomo, Turkey was never that great. Its membership in NATO was largely a matter of strategic convenience, not conviction. And while nominally a democracy, real political power was vested in Turkey's armed forces—the generals overthrew more than their share of governments—in a nation where the phrase "deep state" was invented.

It is true, as Christopher Caldwell has written in these pages, that Erdogan's recent aggrandizement of power has largely transformed the Turkish head of state into something resembling a French or American president. Still, while Erdogan exercises considerably more arbitrary personal power than Emmanuel Macron or Donald Trump, he may aptly be described as a product of Turkish democracy, which of course renders Turkey's evolution more disturbing.

It would be comforting to believe that Erdogan's thuggish autocracy and reflexive anti-Americanism—not to mention anti-Semitism—were reflections of a single, expendable politician. But they are not: Erdogan is widely admired among Turks, and he and his fellow Islamists in the Justice and Development party (AKP) keep winning elections. Moreover, if public opinion polls are to be believed, the United States is not just unpopular in Turkey but overwhelmingly reviled, an attitude that long antedates the advent of President Trump.

Of course, if public opinion polls or temporary differences of opinion among statesmen were decisive in these matters, the world would be a much more volatile place than it is. Yet Erdogan's statecraft and Turkey's behavior generate predictions that would have been unthinkable—very nearly unmentionable—a decade ago. In particular, Turkey's continued membership in NATO is an open question.

For as Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute pointed out in the *Washington Post* last week ("It's time for Turkey and NATO to go their separate ways"), American defenders of Turkey's status within the alliance seem resolutely blind to what "15 years of Erdogan has done to the United States' former ally. In short, they confuse Turkey of yesteryear with Turkey today." And Turkey today is, by any measure, inimical to the interests of the United States and NATO.

Turkish policies facilitated the growth and nourishment of the Islamic State, allowing ISIS fighters to pass through Turkey with impunity. And Turkey's ongoing war against its Kurdish minority has not just hampered America's war on terror—preventing access to Saddam Hussein's Iraq via Turkey's border during the Iraq war—but has brought it close to open conflict with U.S. forces in northern Syria.

As Rubin points out, "Turkish nationalists have attacked American sailors when U.S. ships are docked in Turkish ports," the AKP has demanded the arrest of American airmen

stationed at NATO's Incirlik Air Base, and Turkish security personnel have a habit of attacking and beating American civilians on American soil, most recently in Washington, D.C. In all of these instances, it should be emphasized, the official Turkish reaction has not been conciliatory, or apologetic, but defiant. And Erdogan has now turned his attention toward Moscow, where he seeks to purchase Russian missiles for Turkey's air defenses.

Inasmuch as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded in 1949 as a Western bulwark against Soviet expansion, the notion of a NATO member in 2018 integrating its defenses with Moscow's must necessarily concentrate minds in Brussels. And in Washington, too. For while the United States and its NATO allies have historically averted their eyes from Turkish adventurism, most notably during its 1974 invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus, the only lesson Turkey has faithfully absorbed is that concession is the automatic Western response.

Which brings us to President Trump. Six decades of Turkish membership in NATO have yielded a wide-ranging apparatus of American appeasement: hundreds of retired military officers with happy memories of Turkish brothers-in-arms; scores of ex-diplomats and ex-CIA officers; lobbyists and well-paid scholar/publicists by the dozens. To some degree, the old machinery may still be relied upon to rationalize Ankara's policies and pretend that Erdogan's behavior is exceptional, just as the State Department will stick to its antique talking points. But the contrary evidence about Turkey has reached critical mass, and if any American president is inclined to overlook convenient fictions and react swiftly and instinctively, it's Trump.

In present circumstances, this has been refreshing. The case of the hapless American pastor Andrew Brunson, detained in Izmir as a diplomatic hostage, has prompted Trump to bypass the customary channels and defend U.S. (as well as European) interests by calling Erdogan's bluff. Trump's diplomatic sanctions against two Turkish cabinet ministers, as well as stiff tariffs on Turkish manufacturing, have sent the lira into a tailspin and prompted more threats and maledictions from Ankara.

No doubt Erdogan will respond as he and his precursors have customarily done, with bullying tactics and offensive rhetoric ("Are you ready to give [Americans] an Ottoman slap?" he asked at a recent rally). But while the future of Turkey rests in Erdogan's hands, the future of Turkish-American—indeed, Turkish-NATO—relations stands at an obvious crossroads.

Lord Palmerston once famously observed that nations have no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests. Iran is now our enemy but once was our friend. And who knows where the mullahs, or Erdogan's regime, are headed? American interests remain permanent, if not always obvious. ♦


# Tax Reform Tied to Lower Electricity Costs

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**
PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The positive effects of last year's tax reform legislation continue to ripple through the economy, benefiting both businesses and consumers in a variety of ways. One of the positive impacts was uncovered in a new analysis released by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Global Energy Institute (GEI) this month, which found that electricity customers across the U.S. are saving millions as a result of the law.

Across the 12 states analyzed so far—with results for additional states to come—customer savings over the next five years will range from $100 million in Maine to over $3 billion in California. This is a positive development for businesses, which will see lower operating expenses and increased efficiency, as well as for consumers, who will save on average between $200 and $500 in utility costs over the next five years.

On top of this, it's likely that customers will experience even greater cost reductions once the regulations governing the implementation of the tax law are fully determined. This drop in electricity costs represents real money for the American people, who will then use their extra cash to shop at local businesses and save for the future. This is why each state in the study also sees meaningful GDP growth and job gains as a result of these customer savings.

How has tax reform pulled this off? Investor-funded electric utilities set their rates based on their cost of service, a pricing mechanism that allows them to recoup their tax expenses from ratepayers. Tax reform lowered the rates for investor-owned utilities in almost every state, enabling them to share the benefits with their customers in the form of smaller monthly bills.

The analysis from GEI shows just one of the ways tax reform is having its intended pro-growth effect. The benefits of the tax law touch every state and nearly every industry, in part by boosting take home pay for 90% of American workers. By empowering businesses and families to keep more of their hard-earned money, the law is growing the economy and boosting business confidence.

The U.S. Chamber was a proud proponent of the tax reform legislation as it worked its way through Congress and into law. Since then, we've tracked some of the many American companies that have passed on their own savings to employees and customers in the form of reduced prices, salary raises, bonuses, and new benefits. These examples can be found on an interactive map at uschamber.com/tax-reform.
The new analysis of electricity costs can be found at uschamber.com/global-energy-institute.



**Learn more at uschamber.com/abovethefold.**

# Chuck Grassley's Moment

## The chairman of the Judiciary Committee is no longer Senator Bipartisan. BY FRED BARNES



*Grassley pours tea in the pork tent at the Iowa state fair in Des Moines, August 9, 2014.*

TOM WILLIAMS / CQ ROLL CALL / GETTY

*Corning, Iowa*

Senator Chuck Grassley seems out of place in Washington. He loves to eat at Perkins, the Midwest restaurant chain. But the nearest one from Washington is 60 miles away in Winchester, Virginia—too far for dinner. For dessert, there's Dairy Queen, but not on Capitol Hill. His favorite summer interlude is a day at the Iowa state fair. "It's a kind of reminder of everything we have in Iowa and not just agriculture," he says. He gives tours of the massive fairgrounds to out-of-staters from time to time.

Next to being a Republican senator, Grassley is best known as the nation's foremost critic of the History Channel. He loved the old shows about World War II but says the channel airs too little actual history now. "When I turned it on in July, I got a show about pawnbrokers," he says. So he tweets about history instead and calls his Twitter feed "the real history channel."

But forget the charming folkways. Grassley is now, in his 38th year in the Senate, one of the strongest players on Capitol Hill—and one of the boldest. He once was Senator Bipartisan, but he's put that phase behind him. Confronted by Democrats' unprincipled, no-holds-barred opposition to Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh and other Republican initiatives, he had to. Grassley also had a reputation for being deliberate, but an adviser refers to him these days as "aggressive."

As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, he'll run the hearings, starting September 4, on the confirmation of Kavanaugh, who will almost certainly become the fifth conservative on the Supreme Court, replacing the retiring Anthony Kennedy.

Democrats are apoplectic and have reason to be. They've been crushed by Grassley's forceful response to their attacks. It helps that Kavanaugh, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, is an impressive jurist. But what's striking is the commanding position Grassley has put Kavanaugh in to get through the Senate confirmation process unscathed.

Even before Kavanaugh was nominated, Democrats insisted the "Biden rule" should apply to any High Court choice by President Trump. As interpreted by Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, this means a Supreme Court nominee should not be considered in an election year like 2018, just as Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell invoked the rule in 2016, declining to hold hearings on President Obama's choice for the court.

This notion was quickly shot down by Grassley, with an assist from *Washington Post* fact checker Glenn Kessler. Joe Biden, then a Democratic senator from Delaware, had been clear when he enunciated the rule in 1992 that he was talking about *presidential* election years. Grassley knew this. He's been in the Senate for 37 years, and he was on the Judiciary Committee when Biden was chairman. In a flash, the Biden rule vanished as a talking point.

The day after President Trump named Kavanaugh, Republican senators and their aides were bombarded with background material from Grassley. The idea here—part of it anyway—was to arm Republicans to push back against Democratic attacks. That was followed by a barrage of statements and letters of support for Kavanaugh.

Democrats had trouble keeping up with Grassley's fast pace. They now plan to talk about issues like abortion and Obamacare, but that's where they started. There's a name for this: returning to square one. It's not a sign you're making progress.

Grassley tries to visit each of Iowa's

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*Fred Barnes is an executive editor at* The Weekly Standard.

99 counties at least once a year. In early August, he made five appearances around Iowa. In Conroy, he dealt with hostile questioners—no problem. Grassley has mastered the Q&A. He answers in two or three sentences, then turns immediately to the next questioner, leaving no time in between for boos or heckling.

Kavanaugh isn't the only big-time issue Grassley has on his mind—that is, an issue that attracts national media attention for weeks or months. The senator has moved where the Republican-led Senate Intelligence Committee has feared to tread and where Democrats refuse to. Grassley is investigating the FBI to find out why it submitted a dossier with tales of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russians to gain approval to wiretap a low-level Trump adviser.

In effect, he's joined forces with Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. Democrats and the media loathe Nunes, but Grassley likes him. It was the Nunes committee that subpoenaed the bank records that revealed the Hillary Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee paid for the dossier.

As a Senate committee chairman, Grassley hasn't had to endure harsh treatment—so far. The Washington press corps is wary of taking on Grassley, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), and the committee's powerhouse investigative staff. The lonely chairman of the House committee is fair game to the brave journalists in the anti-Nunes cabal.

But Grassley has paid a price for joining the Nunes side. He has split with his longtime friend, the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, California senator Dianne Feinstein. They're the two oldest senators. Feinstein is 85, Grassley 84. Senate rules require the approval of both the committee chairman and the ranking minority member to authorize an investigation with subpoena power. She refused. By Capitol Hill standards, it was a historic rupture.

Senate Democrats are still on a quest for evidence of Trump collusion with Russia during the 2016 presidential campaign, but so far they're holding an empty bag. The GOP probe is alive and well and scares Democrats. They're desperate to block it, for partisan reasons. Feinstein is running for reelection. And Obama administration officials could be implicated in spying on the Trump campaign, a Watergate-sized transgression.

**Grassley has moved where the Republican-led Senate Intelligence Committee has feared to tread and where Democrats refuse to. He is investigating the FBI to find out why it submitted a dossier with tales of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russians to gain approval to wiretap a low-level Trump adviser. In effect, he's joined forces with Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. Democrats and the media loathe Nunes, but Grassley likes him.**

Grassley lacks subpoena power, but Nunes has it. (In the House, the chairman has sole subpoena power.) Working as a team, the two can swap information. The dossier, by the way, has turned out to be nothing more than a tip sheet—a poor one at that. Sued for libel in London, its author Christopher Steele said under oath that the dossier contained "raw intelligence." Its "unverified" leads "warranted further investigation." Steele couldn't vouch for the dossier's truthfulness.

Grassley, along with Graham and other committee Republicans, didn't buckle. He and Graham have asked the Justice Department to investigate Steele, ostensibly to see if he lied to the FBI. That's a pretext. Grassley wants to learn more, especially about who ordered surveillance of a low-level Trump adviser. Feinstein wants everyone to know less.

One might never suspect it, but Grassley has a sense of humor. And guess who he makes fun of? Yes, the hapless Chuck Schumer. Grassley published a piece in the *Wall Street Journal* in early August that recalled Schumer's vow to oppose Kavanaugh "with everything I've got." Schumer was just being honest, according to Grassley. Yet Democrats are demanding more and more and more Kavanaugh documents. How many more do Schumer and Democrats need, he asked, "when they're already voting no?"

All this leads to a big question: Why has Grassley been so effective in guiding Kavanaugh toward confirmation as a justice of the Supreme Court? Grassley is not a lawyer. He's a farmer by trade, growing corn and soybeans on his farm in northeast Iowa. He graduated from the University of Northern Iowa, not Yale or Harvard. He's been influenced by the right people. He filled the seat of H.R. Gross when he was elected to the House in 1974, bucking a Democratic tide. Don't remember H.R. Gross? He was the congressman who was always on the floor when the House was in session, challenging excessive spending. Grassley was then elected to the Senate in the Reagan landslide of 1980.

If he's not the hardest-working member of Congress, he's close. He doesn't have time to read newspapers during the week when he's working on Capitol Hill. So he saves all the papers and reads them on the weekend. He hasn't missed a Senate vote since 1993. He's been on the Judiciary Committee for all 37 years of his Senate career. Kavanaugh's hearing will be the 15th for a Supreme Court nominee he's participated in. He says the most impressive was Robert Bork.

Grassley is smarter, better prepared, more clever, and, more often than not, more experienced than his opponents. In 2016, he joined Mitch

McConnell in refusing to take up Obama's Supreme Court nominee. He had breakfast with Judge Merrick Garland, the unlucky pick, but held no hearing. Democrats howled, but they would have done the same had they controlled the Senate with a lame-duck Republican as president.

Grassley was also running for reelection in 2016, and Democrats sought to capitalize on the lack of a hearing. They recruited former Iowa lieutenant governor Patty Judge to run against him. As usual, the media took its cue from Democrats and declared Grassley in trouble. The Democratic challenger's theme was "Do your job." Judge said she was the "one judge" Grassley could not ignore. Grassley won, 60 percent to 36 percent.

In the Senate, Grassley has been a respected figure for decades. He's carved out issues of his own—ethanol, wind farming, whistleblowers, criminal justice reform, tax fairness, spending restraint. Most of his issues don't thrill the national press. But a Supreme Court fight does—even the dry issue of what Kavanaugh documents and how many should be made public, and how long the period should last between the nomination and the vote on confirmation. Democrats were interested in these matters because they offered a way to drag out the process past the midterm election. Delay is their only hope. If that happens, the Kavanaugh nomination might be doomed.

Grassley was ready. So were his staff, McConnell, the White House, the Kavanaugh team, and well-heeled conservative groups. They were loaded with numbers that Grassley has trotted out early and often. They showed the nomination was not being rushed to a vote, nor was Grassley skimping on documents. Kavanaugh, for instance, has released more documents than the past five nominees.

The numbers killed Schumer. After Schumer declared in July that Kavanaugh would threaten "the rights and freedoms" that Americans enjoy, Grassley told him, "Loosen up, Chuck." Good advice then, good advice now. ♦

# The Trouble with Impeachment

## After Manafort and Cohen, the Democrats are struggling not to overreach.

**BY MICHAEL WARREN**




*Protesters at the White House, July 18*

WILL CLARK / CQ ROLL CALL / GETTY

Steve Bannon used to refer to the Trump campaign's crew of staff, advisers, aides, and hangers-on as the "island of misfit toys." Karl Rove, no stranger to successful White House runs, better described them as "walking disasters."

Two of those walking disasters are going to prison. Paul Manafort, Bannon's predecessor as the top Trump campaign official, was found guilty on August 21 of eight counts of bank and tax fraud. Manafort is the biggest fish special counsel Robert Mueller has landed so far—even if the charges that Manafort hid or failed to disclose millions of dollars in income from his consulting work overseas do not directly reflect Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

The other of Trump's associates heading to the clink is Michael Cohen, the president's longtime lawyer and "fixer," who pleaded guilty to eight criminal counts in federal court. That case, which Mueller passed off to the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan, involved investigating private financial transactions Cohen conducted primarily on Trump's behalf. Two were payments from Cohen to women, Karen McDougal and Stormy Daniels, who claimed to have had sexual affairs with Trump and were preparing to go public with their stories before the 2016 presidential election. According to Cohen's August 21 plea deal, he hid from the public information damaging to the campaign "in coordination and at the direction of a candidate for federal office"—an obvious reference to Trump and one that implicates him particularly in the silencing of Daniels. This contradicts statements from the president, who has thus far denied he

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knew about the payments until after Cohen made them.

Trump seemed stunned by the one-two punch of the Manafort and Cohen news. At a rally in West Virginia hours after the verdict and plea deal were announced, he avoided the subject. The next morning, however, Trump settled into his familiar pattern: tweeting praise of those loyal to him, disparaging those he believes disloyal, and accusing others of having done something worse.

"I feel very badly for Paul Manafort and his wonderful family. 'Justice' took a 12 year old tax case, among other things, applied tremendous pressure on him and, unlike Michael Cohen, he refused to 'break'—make up stories in order to get a 'deal.' Such respect for a brave man!" Trump tweeted on August 22. "A large number of counts, ten, could not even be decided in the Paul Manafort case. Witch Hunt!" and "Michael Cohen plead guilty to two counts of campaign finance violations that are not a crime. President Obama had a big campaign finance violation and it was easily settled!"

The White House followed his lead that afternoon, with press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders repeating a mantra in her briefing: "The president did nothing wrong, there are no charges against him." Sanders insisted the Manafort case had "nothing to do with the president, nothing to do with his campaign." She also said, "just because Michael Cohen made a plea deal, that doesn't mean it implicates the president."

"The White House is focused on the same things that we were focused on the first day that we got here," Sanders summarized, reflecting the broad "this changes nothing" attitude that the president's defenders have taken.

But a great deal has changed. Despite assertions to the contrary, Cohen *has* implicated Trump in an attempt to cover up embarrassing stories right before an election. And Manafort's own legal issues are far from over—he's preparing for a second trial, and the pressure on him to make a bargain with prosecutors will mount. The August 21 developments only accelerate the larger investigation and, politically, that's making things complicated for both Republicans and Democrats.

Some GOP operatives are echoing the White House's status quo assessment, saying the Manafort and Cohen news won't alter their strategy in the midterms. Voters already have their minds made up about Trump, Mueller, and collusion with Russia, they say, and only something substantive directly involving the president and Russia would make a difference. "I'm not seeing this Manafort/Cohen news changing much at this point," says John Thomas, a Republican consultant working for House candidates. "The special counsel can change things if and when he makes an announcement."

**Focusing on protecting investigators or delaying court nominations is meant to divert grassroots attention from the I-word, which Democratic leaders in Washington fear is what their base hungers for.**

But this doesn't mean they aren't worried. "It puts incumbent Republicans and candidates in battleground districts in a precarious spot," says a House GOP campaign operative. "If these individuals support calls to move forward with investigations (or impeachment), they will depress the Trump-base vote because they are bailing on the president. If they stand firm and dismiss the charges as politically motivated, they will potentially alienate GOP-leaning and independent voters (like those key college-educated, suburban ones) because they aren't acting as a sufficient check on the president."

As Oklahoma congressman Tom Cole told the *New York Times*, "Anybody who says this is not disturbing is not being honest, so my advice to any candidate would be: Keep your powder dry and don't rush to attack or defend anybody because you just don't know enough to have a reaction that you can still defend three months from now."

For Democrats, Trump World's legal woes present an opportunity—if they don't blow it. In an August 22 letter, House minority leader Nancy Pelosi urged her colleagues to focus on "protecting Special Counsel Mueller" and "calling on [Republicans] to immediately investigate the President's relentless assaults on the FBI and the Special Counsel." Chuck Schumer, the Democratic leader in the Senate, latched on to the idea of delaying the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in response to the Manafort conviction and Cohen plea deal.

Their idea is to divert grassroots attention from the I-word, which Democratic leaders in Washington fear is what their base hungers for. Connecticut representative Jim Himes made explicit the case against impeachment his party's leaders are only hinting at. "No forward motion should be made on impeachment until special counsel Mueller has had a chance to finish his work and to tell us what the truth is," Himes said on CNN. But it was Kevin de Léon, the California ultra-progressive challenging incumbent Democratic senator Dianne Feinstein, who channeled the party faithful in a campaign email. The subject line: "IMPEACH IMPEACH IMPEACH."

The events of August 21 have started to clarify what Trump and his island of misfit toys were really up to in 2016. That, in turn, brings forth the central question of the fast-approaching midterm elections: Should Trump face political consequences for what we've learned about his associations over the past two years? Republicans will be tempted to argue "no" to deny Democrats the issue, but there's a high risk that what happened with Manafort and Cohen is just the beginning. Democrats will try to insist on the importance of these events without looking too eager and so rallying depressed Republicans to the polls to stop an impending impeachment. What neither party seems confident about is where the voting public will stand in November. ♦

# The John Edwards Parallel

## Hush money and campaign-finance law.

**BY JOHN MCCORMACK**



*Is there a lesson here? John Edwards arrives at a federal courthouse, May 24, 2012.*

ALEX WONG / GETTY

We can't say we weren't warned. In August 1998, as Congress moved toward impeaching Bill Clinton, Donald Trump was asked by Chris Matthews in a CNBC interview if he'd ever run for president. "People want me to all the time," Trump replied. "I don't like it. . . . Can you imagine how controversial I'd be? You think about [Bill Clinton] with the women. How about me with the women? Can you imagine?"

Exactly 20 years later, investigations into Donald Trump and his associates are leaving less and less to the imagination. They are also providing a great opportunity for most Republicans and most Democrats to act like shameless hypocrites.

Twenty years ago, Republicans were compelled by the iron logic that perjury and obstruction of justice to cover up an affair with a White House intern required the impeachment of Bill Clinton. Democrats argued that only raving partisans or prudes would impeach a president for lying about sex. Now President Donald Trump faces evidence and testimony from his former lawyer Michael Cohen that in 2016 Cohen made payments in violation of campaign-finance laws totaling $280,000 to women who alleged affairs with Donald Trump "in coordination with and at the direction" of candidate Trump "for the principal purpose of influencing the election." In the days and weeks to come, you may get whiplash from watching Republicans and Democrats switch sides on the question of whether committing a crime to cover up an immoral but legal sexual affair rises to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors.

Of course, the question of hypocrisy here rests in part on the assumption that Trump is in fact guilty of a felony, and many of his supporters dispute that. As evidence, they point to a case that more closely mirrors the allegations Trump is facing today: the 2012 trial of former North Carolina senator John Edwards, who was accused of violating campaign finance laws because his donors made nearly $1 million in payments to his mistress during Edwards's 2008 presidential campaign. She gave birth to a daughter fathered by Edwards in February 2008. The jury was hung on five counts and found Edwards not guilty of one.

The Heritage Foundation's Hans von Spakovsky, who served on the Federal Election Commission from 2006 to 2007 and on President Trump's election integrity commission in 2017, wrote an article in 2012: "Why John Edwards Is Guilty." "As the FEC said in a prior advisory opinion, the key question is, 'Would the third party pay the expense if the candidate was not running for Federal office?'" he wrote. The multimillionaire Edwards could have made the payments himself, von Spakovsky noted, but "such personal payments would have blown up his candidacy and made it impossible to hide what he clearly wanted to keep hidden."

"My theory at the time proved to be wrong," von Spakovsky told me the day after Cohen's guilty plea. Not only did a jury fail to convict Edwards, von Spakovsky argues the case against Edwards was stronger than the one against Trump. He notes that Trump reimbursed Cohen, and "a candidate can spend as much of his own money as he wants" on his own campaign. But those contributions must be disclosed. "Apparently, there's a pattern of making these kinds of payments," he says, to bolster the argument that the payments weren't primarily intended to influence the campaign. "The [Edwards] mistress was actually working for the campaign. So those were optimal facts for the government, and yet they lost the case," he says.

That's one side of the argument.

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Fred Wertheimer of Democracy 21, an organization that pushes for strict campaign finance laws, argues the opposite—that the case against Trump is stronger than the case against Edwards. "I thought Edwards violated the law," says Wertheimer, but "in the Edwards case you did not have anyone involved who said the money was given to influence the election." Now, the government has the testimony of Michael Cohen. Von Spakovsky counters: "Cohen was agreeing to a plea deal. I think he was crying when he did it. He was saying absolutely anything in order to get a light sentence. . . . That to me has no credibility or relevance whatsoever."

In addition to Cohen's testimony, and whatever evidence there is detailing his coordination with the Trump campaign, prosecutors will also have the testimony of David Pecker, whose *National Enquirer* was involved in the deal to "catch and kill" stories about Trump's affairs. *Vanity Fair* reported on August 23 that Pecker was granted immunity in exchange for his testimony. The alleged campaign-finance law crimes involve both exceeding the $2,700 per person limit on contributions and violating the law banning corporate donations. Cohen has already released an audio tape in which he discusses setting up a company to make one payment of $150,000 in what appears to be hush money to a former *Playboy* model. "I need to open up a company for the transfer of all of that info regarding our friend David," Cohen says, apparently referring to David Pecker. Trump replies: "So, what do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

For the payments to be illegal, it must be proven they were made for the purpose of influencing the election. Wertheimer argues that the timing of the Cohen payments makes the case against Trump stronger. Edwards set up the financial scheme with his donors shortly after the affair and pregnancy occurred, and Edwards argued he had done so to keep his wife, who was suffering from cancer, from finding out. Both of Cohen's hush-money payments occurred after Trump was the nominee, nearly a decade after the alleged affairs occurred. Furthermore, as reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, Cohen resisted paying off porn actress Stephanie Clifford when her lawyer first approached him in September 2016. But shortly after the *Access Hollywood* tape emerged in which Trump bragged about grabbing women "by the pussy"—comments Trump dismissed as "locker-room talk"—Cohen reached a $130,000 deal with Clifford.

The deal occurred as many prominent Republicans were abandoning Trump. Even some of Trump's staunchest conservative supporters—such as talk radio host Hugh Hewitt—were calling on him to drop out of the race. If the hush-money arrangement with Clifford had been intended simply to keep Trump's current wife from finding out, why wasn't it made until October, and only after the *Access Hollywood* tape was released? The timing of this payment appears to be some of the strongest evidence that Trump directed the payment to advance his campaign, thus violating the law.

A jury will not hear a case against Trump anytime soon, if ever, given the Justice Department's longstanding position that a sitting president cannot be indicted. And there are other questions, perhaps more important than Trump's guilt or innocence of campaign-law violations in determining whether or not he should be impeached and convicted. Should a president be impeached for crimes committed before he took office? Does this crime, if proven, really rise to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors? After the Senate failed to convict Bill Clinton, would it really convict Donald Trump? These are all questions the next Congress may decide. But perhaps the most important questions for now are: What else does Michael Cohen know, and what else will Robert Mueller find out? ♦

# Trump's Nuclear Options

## Two bad tactics he might try.

**BY JACK GOLDSMITH**

It's much clearer now why Donald Trump has been furious with Attorney General Jeff Sessions ever since he recused himself from the Russia investigation in March 2017. That recusal set in motion events that eventually resulted in deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein's appointment of special counsel Robert Mueller to investigate Russian election meddling and "*any* matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation."

Once the straight-arrow Mueller started sniffing around Trump's campaign, he discovered lots of criminal behavior that had nothing to do with Russian influence operations. Last week yielded the most dramatic fruits yet: the conviction of Trump's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, for bank and tax fraud, and a guilty plea by Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, for fraud and campaign violations, including some that directly implicate the president.

Manafort and Cohen would likely be free today had the Russia investigation stayed within traditional

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Justice Department channels using traditional Justice Department resources. But once Rosenstein appointed Mueller, the grinding logic of a single-minded, heavily resourced, subpoena-wielding independent prosecutor pursuing every avenue toward a determined end took over.

That same logic led the independent counsel in the 1990s from Bill and Hillary Clinton's Arkansas land investments, to the downfall of associate attorney general Webster Hubbell for law firm fraud, to President Clinton's impeachment for lying about sexual relations with an intern. It has now led Mueller from a Russian counterintelligence probe, to Manafort's lavish wardrobe, to Cohen's payoff for Trump to Stormy Daniels. And Mueller's just getting started.

There is no candy-coating this for the president. Four members of his campaign are now felons, as is his hatchet man Cohen, who accused the president in court of directing him to commit a federal crime. One can only imagine what these men will tell Mueller about the possible past criminal behavior of Trump and his family, and conceivably about their involvement in Russian meddling.

Even before then, the Cohen accusation, combined with the president's lies and obstructions related to Russia, would suffice to justify impeachment proceedings in the House of Representatives. Impeachment, not criminal prosecution, is the immediate danger for the president, since longstanding Justice Department rulings preclude criminal trials for sitting presidents. Impeachment is as much a political as a legal process, which is why the midterm elections and control of the House loom so large.

In this context, and as Mueller proceeds apace, President Trump will be likely to deploy some combination of two tactics to try to save himself.

First, he will continue to draw a red line at his "no collusion" claim and insist that anything else Mueller finds is the harvest of an illegitimate Democratic "witch hunt" that seeks to overturn the election results through criminal process. This approach depends on Mueller's finding no serious dirt on Trump related to Russian meddling. Even if that assumption holds, the mounting stench of criminality enclosing the Trump presidency may render his red line politically irrelevant.

Which is why the president is also likely to deploy offensive weapons. Three powers that a president can wield unilaterally with practically limitless discretion and with little constraining process are pardons, dismissals of executive officials, and security clearance revocations.

Trump could bark orders today to pardon everyone Mueller is investigating (except possibly himself); to fire Mueller and his team, as well as everyone in the Justice Department who didn't carry out this order; and to yank the security clearances of anyone he didn't fire, which would seriously slow any federal investigation that remained.

If you think the wounded, cornered Trump won't choose some version of this nuclear option, you haven't been paying attention. Trump believes in his bones that razing the institutions around him brings him advantage. And even if that belief proves false in this context, he will enjoy trying to burn them down, even as he is consumed.

Our nation faces scary days ahead as the president tests how much pain his administration and party will tolerate. But Trump cannot "get away with it." The American people will issue their judgments in 2018 and 2020. And no matter how much Trump, in the interim, abuses presidential power, no matter how many criminals he self-servingly sets free, no matter how much he slows the Russia investigation, he cannot destroy the institutions of justice that he so despises.

Mueller's victories this week are evidence that those institutions have worked well despite Trump's unprecedented efforts to derail them. The remarkable independence displayed by the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation throughout this ordeal is an outgrowth of the last great episode of gross presidential abuse of justice: Watergate.

No governmental system powerful enough to function well can prevent gross abuse. But our constitutional system has always been characterized by what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called "the vital mechanism of self-correction." We will get through this test. And as with Watergate, our system of justice will have proved itself strong and will emerge all the stronger as a result. ♦



RICK LOOMIS / GETTY

*Trump at a rally in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, August 2*

# A Generally Poor Secretary General

## Kofi Annan, 1938-2018.

**BY CLAUDIA ROSETT**

In United Nations circles, Kofi Annan's death last Saturday is being mourned in terms more befitting a saint than a former secretary general. Ted Turner's U.N. Foundation eulogized him as "a fearless champion for the powerless." Departing human rights commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein called him "humanity's best example." Current U.N. secretary general António Guterres tells us he was a "a guiding force for good" and a leader of "matchless dignity and determination." He added, "In many ways, Kofi Annan was the United Nations."

That much, at least, is true. Annan was the first U.N. chief to rise through the organization's bureaucracy, where he first began working in 1962. For decades he focused on personnel and budget issues, navigating the U.N. maze. In 1993, he became head of peacekeeping, and from 1997 to 2006 he served as secretary general. In that post, he played a significant role in shaping the U.N.'s policies as it emerged from its Cold War paralysis with the aim of becoming supreme arbiter of the New World Order. In 2001, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded its Peace Prize jointly to Annan and the U.N., "for their work for a better organized and more peaceful world."

This turned out to be one of the Nobel committee's more poorly timed prizes. It was announced just weeks after the September 11 al Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States. Those were followed by bitter dissension at the U.N. over the situation in Iraq and the eruption during the remainder of Annan's tenure of a series of U.N. scandals that called into question the integrity of both the U.N. and Annan himself.

Since the U.N.'s founding in 1945, it has had nine secretaries general, most of them mediocrities, punctuated by the embarrassment of the Nazi-connected Kurt Waldheim. Annan, by contrast, had a knack for celebrity, which he leveraged to pursue an expanded U.N. agenda (and budget). The ensuing scandals jeopardized those goals.

All of which might help explain why the eminences of today's U.N. and its affiliates are so generous with their posthumous praise of Annan and why they appear determined to rewrite his actual record. For the rest of us, however, it should be possible to mourn the man without ignoring his professional failings as leader of the U.N., failings that left millions of people worldwide to bear the costs.

Two landmark sagas define Annan's U.N. career. First, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which occurred while Annan was undersecretary general for peacekeeping. In the months before the slaughter, the U.N. received a series of urgent cables from the head of the U.N. peacekeeping force in Rwanda, Canadian Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire. Warning about the rising tensions and local stockpiling of weapons, Dallaire repeatedly proposed raiding the arms caches. Again and again, Annan's office told him to stand down. Soon after those orders came the killings, in which approximately 500,000 to 800,000 people were butchered.

It's not clear that Dallaire's plans to intervene could have prevented the genocide. What is clear is that Annan chose to block any such attempt.

Yet the Rwanda catastrophe did no damage to Annan's career at the U.N. Neither did his passivity when 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were massacred in Srebrenica while under the erstwhile protection of U.N. peacekeepers in 1995. Annan was appointed secretary general just two years later.

Which brings us to Oil-for-Food, the U.N. relief program created for Iraq while it was under Saddam Hussein's rule (and under U.N.-imposed sanctions). Thanks to Annan's poor stewardship, Oil-for-Food played out as the most colossally corrupt and tyrant-friendly relief program ever run by the United Nations.

Officially, the aim of the program was to ease the deprivation of Iraq's more than 20 million people while containing their murderous tyrant, Saddam, via U.N. sanctions. Under Oil-for-Food, Saddam was permitted to sell Iraqi oil abroad in order to import food and medicine. These transactions were supposed to be strictly monitored and controlled by the U.N. To cover the cost of monitoring, the U.N. levied a 2.2 percent fee on Saddam's oil sales, a de facto commission that, over the life of the program, generated approximately $1.4 billion for the U.N. out of some $64 billion worth of U.N.-approved oil sales.

While the U.N. gave its approval and collected its fees, Saddam gamed the program on every conceivable level. He underpriced his oil and overpaid for billions of dollars worth of relief supplies, generating fat profits for select business partners around the globe who were willing to kick back some of this lucre to him. While Saddam's regime used these illicitly obtained billions to buy weapons, build palaces, and bribe influential figures to campaign for the complete lifting of sanctions, Iraqis received short rations of rotten food and expired medicine. In some cases, it was questionable whether Saddam's "humanitarian" purchases even remotely matched the descriptions of them found in U.N. records. With U.N. approval, for example, Saddam's government bought "weaning cereal" from a Chinese weapons manufacturer, "adult milk" from a

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Russian oil company, and "detergent" from Syria, Libya, and Sudan.

When the U.S.-led invasion toppled Saddam in 2003, documentary evidence of Oil-for-Food's corruption began spilling out of Iraq. Investigations by the Treasury, Pentagon, CIA, FBI, and Congress unearthed a global web of graft and front companies for which Oil-for-Food had effectively served as cover. Annan initially resisted calls for the U.N. itself to investigate until documents surfaced in early 2004 implying that the executive director of Oil-for-Food, Benon Sevan, had taken bribes from Baghdad. Annan then authorized an Independent Inquiry Committee led by former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker.

Volcker's inquiry issued its final report in 2005, and it largely spared Annan embarrassment by couching its findings in elliptical language. But Volcker did report that Annan knew about abuses and corruption under Oil-for-Food, yet failed so thoroughly to do anything about them that his "cumulative management performance … fell short of the standards that the United Nations Organization should strive to maintain."

Little of the Oil-for-Food corruption should have come as a surprise to Annan. Oil-for-Food was by far the biggest relief program on his docket. He had been directly involved in almost every stage of its development. Prior to becoming secretary general, he led the first U.N. negotiating team that discussed the idea with Baghdad. In 1997, one of his first acts as secretary general was to appoint as his executive coordinator for U.N. reform a Canadian crony and longtime U.N. fixture named Maurice Strong, who recommended that Oil-for-Food—which began as a relatively modest relief effort—be consolidated into one office reporting directly to the secretary general. To run this office, Annan appointed another U.N. pal, Sevan, who served as executive director of Oil-for-Food from late 1997 until the U.N. relinquished control of the program to the Coalition Provisional Authority in late 2003.

During the course of Oil-for-Food, Annan repeatedly and successfully urged the U.N. Security Council to expand the scale and scope of the program, including raising, then removing altogether, limits on how much oil Saddam was allowed to sell and permitting Saddam to import oil equipment to boost production. This greatly enhanced Saddam's illicit profits both from graft within the program and oil-smuggling alongside it.

Post-Saddam, as various investigations of the program moved forward, it emerged that in 1997, Annan's U.N. reform architect, Strong, had cashed a check for $988,885 from Saddam's regime. (Strong told investigators he did not know the money came from Baghdad.) Annan's handpicked executive director of Oil-for-Food, Sevan, was accused by both the Volcker Committee and U.S. prosecutors of having taken bribes from Baghdad via Oil-for-Food contracts starting in 1998 (in amounts totaling $160,000, according to a 2007 federal indictment). Sevan claimed innocence and conveniently skipped town for his native Cyprus in 2005, never to return to New York to face justice.



*Annan, left, is welcomed in Baghdad by Saddam Hussein, February 22, 1998.*

AFP / GETTY

Early in the investigations, Annan's office said that Annan's son, Kojo, had quit his consultancy with a Swiss company, Cotecna, before it won the U.N. contract to inspect goods imported into Iraq under Oil-for-Food. In late 2004, news emerged (later confirmed in 2005 by the Volcker inquiry) that Kojo in fact had continued to receive monthly "non-compete" payments from Cotecna for the duration of the U.N. program.

As for Annan himself, while calling the American-led invasion of Iraq "illegal" because it did not have the approval of the U.N. Security Council, he said nothing to alert the world to Saddam's practice of lavishing lucrative Oil-for-Food contracts on influential individuals and companies from the three veto-wielding members of the Security Council that opposed the United States: Russia, China, and France. When evidence of this influence-peddling became public, Annan did not dispute the graft. He simply pronounced it "inconceivable" that Saddam's payoffs could have influenced these three countries.

In congressional testimony in May 2005, John Fawcett, a leading expert on corruption in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, warned of wider damage. Fawcett noted that the Oil-for-Food program existed during a time of turmoil and transition around the globe, as the ground rules of the new global economy were being hashed out. For officials in dozens of countries, including China, Russia, and many nations in the Middle East, the lesson of Oil-for-Food was that bribery and corruption were acceptable tools of business: "The Oil-for-Food program gave a tremendous boost toward the institutionalization of corruption within the global economy, the repercussions of which have barely begun to emerge," Fawcett testified.

In Annan's defense, reforming the U.N. is likely beyond the abilities of any mortal. But the corollary is that entrusting it with the responsibility of acting as the guardian of the modern world order is an invitation to carnage, corruption, and failure. Annan's real legacy should be a warning to future generations of the pitfalls of relying on the U.N. That's less flowery and flattering than the tributes to Annan, but potentially far more useful advice for the powerless, ordinary people we are told he cared about so much. ♦

# Losing a War

*A year after President Trump announced his Afghan policy, the Taliban are closer to victory than we are*

**By Thomas Joscelyn**

President Donald Trump opposes his own policy in Afghanistan. It shows.

Trump's disdain for the war in Afghanistan had long been well known, so no one in the White House knew what he would decide to do about it in the summer of 2017. Multiple options were on the table in Trump's freewheeling administration. The president had heard plans ranging from privatizing the war under the authority of military contractors, to a narrowly defined, CIA-led counterterrorism mission, to a more robust deployment of American forces, to a complete withdrawal. Finally, after months of debate, Trump decided that the U.S. military would stay in Afghanistan and ordered a modest increase of several thousand troops. The president was frustrated that his own advisers had talked him into this option, according to current and former administration officials familiar with the deliberations. Nonetheless, Trump grudgingly owned it.



*Trump at Fort Myer, August 21, 2017*

On August 21, 2017, the president announced his decision during a speech at Fort Myer in Arlington, Virginia. "Our troops will fight to win," he said. "We will fight to win." The president recognized that "the American people are weary of war without victory," yet he vowed this iteration of America's longest war would be different. "The men and women who serve our nation in combat deserve a plan for victory," the president said. "They deserve the tools they need, and the trust they have earned, to fight and to win."

No one is talking about winning the war in Afghanistan these days. America hasn't even been trying to win the war. "We do look toward a victory in Afghanistan," Trump's secretary of defense James Mattis said in March. Mattis then quickly clarified that this would not be a "military victory." Instead, the "victory will be a political reconciliation" with the Taliban.

This is not what President Trump said in August 2017. In his speech announcing the policy, the president was openly skeptical that any such peace deal could be reached: "Someday, after an effective military effort, perhaps it will be possible to have a political settlement that includes elements of the Taliban in Afghanistan, but nobody knows if or when that will ever happen."

According to senior administration officials who spoke with The Weekly Standard at the time, that last phrase—"nobody knows if or when that will ever happen"—was Trump's insertion. The president was wary of any strategy that hinged on the idea that a grand bargain with the Taliban was possible. He entertained only the possibility that "elements of the Taliban" could be convinced to lay down their arms—not the group's senior leadership or the majority of the insurgents. Furthermore, the possible talks were to take place only "after an effective military effort."

Despite Trump's talk of winning, no such campaign ever materialized. There has been no effective military effort. The promises to furnish our warfighters with the tools they need to win—and a plan for victory—have gone unfulfilled. We are once again fighting not to lose. But we're losing anyway.

The Taliban launched a massive offensive in Ghazni Province earlier this month. The jihadists ransacked parts of Ghazni's capital city for several days before melting away into the countryside, much of which they already controlled. As Ghazni burned and its residents were sent fleeing, Resolute Support, the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, claimed the city remained "under Afghan control" and Afghan forces were merely performing "clearing operations." It was a scene reminiscent of Baghdad Bob

MARK WILSON / GETTY

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ZAKERIA HASHIMI / AFP / GETTY

*An Afghan man shovels debris after a Taliban attack that burned a market in Ghazni, August 14.*

telling reporters in 2003 that all was well, even as American-led forces easily dispensed with Saddam Hussein's men. The Afghans and Americans established some semblance of normalcy in Ghazni after several days, but by then the Taliban was already rampaging through other areas, killing dozens of security personnel.

The lack of demonstrable success has caused U.S. military commanders to redefine victory. Some of them now contend that the war is a stalemate in which the Taliban is incapable of overrunning Afghanistan's more populated areas. They sell this as progress. But they are seeing the conflict through rose-colored glasses. The insurgents are capable of mustering enough forces for offensives throughout the country at any time. The Taliban's men contest or control approximately 60 percent of the country—as much ground as at any point since the U.S.-led invasion in late 2001. There is no reason to think they feel pressured to negotiate.

Trump preached patience in his speech a year ago, comparing his approach to President Obama's. "Conditions on the ground—not arbitrary timetables—will guide our strategy from now on," Trump said. This was a rebuke to Obama's decision simultaneously to announce a surge in troops and a timetable for their withdrawal in December 2009. Military commanders knew that this created an incentive for the jihadists to wait America out, and that's what they did. Trump also pointed out that President Obama "hastily and mistakenly withdrew from Iraq" in 2011, thereby paving the way for the rise of the Islamic State, or ISIS.

But Trump, like his predecessor, signaled his doubts about the war in announcing his commitment to win it. "My original instinct was to pull out—and, historically, I like following my instincts," he explained.

Trump is an instinctive president—and an impatient one. Sensing that time is short, some administration officials are now attempting to negotiate a face-saving deal with the Taliban, one that allows America to leave without the appearance of having lost. Multiple news outlets in recent weeks have reported that the White House has given the go-ahead for direct talks with the jihadists.

This effort will almost certainly fail—as it did under Barack Obama. One year after the president's announcement of a new Afghanistan policy, it's increasingly clear that the current approach to Afghanistan isn't a radical departure from Obama's but mostly a continuation of it.

## A DIPLOMATIC FIASCO

In the months after President Obama's inauguration in January 2009, the White House conducted a review of America's war in Afghanistan, led by Bruce Riedel, a former intelligence official and Obama campaign adviser. Riedel's policy review concluded that attempting to negotiate with the Taliban's senior leadership would

be foolhardy. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's team pressed on anyway. The initial efforts were led by Richard Holbrooke, the longtime American diplomat who had played an instrumental role in negotiating an end to the Bosnian war. Holbrooke, who died in December 2010, tried to play the same peacemaking role in Afghanistan. He did not succeed; nor did those who came after him. The story of their failure is set out in Clinton's own memoir *Hard Choices*, as well as in *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan* by Steve Coll, a veteran journalist who is currently dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

In 2010, Secretary Clinton adhered to a series of preconditions for talks with the Taliban, insisting: "They must renounce violence; they must abandon their alliance with al Qaeda; and they must abide by the constitution of Afghanistan." These had been the Bush administration's original preconditions for talks with the Taliban. There was no chance the jihadists would meet any of these demands. So in a February 2011 speech, Clinton revised America's terms, converting these preconditions—requirements for the talks to take place at all—into "necessary outcomes" of negotiations. Clinton and others have presented this as a "nuanced change," but it was, in reality, a concession—one of several America was willing to make just to get someone from the Taliban, anyone, to the negotiating table. That the Taliban understood it as a sign of weakness would be clear soon enough.

At first, the Americans and the Afghans couldn't even find a legitimate Taliban emissary to engage, as multiple frauds presented themselves as dealmakers. One of the first supposed liaisons said he was Mullah Mansour, an influential powerbroker within the Taliban. The United States and its allies paid "Mansour" $150,000 and escorted him around Afghanistan as if he were a central character in the war. The Americans eventually figured out that this Mansour was an impostor. The real Mullah Mansour would never agree to peace with the Americans—he was a stalwart ally of al Qaeda who openly referred to Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri as the "heroes" of this age. After the Taliban admitted in July 2015 that its founder, Mullah Omar, had passed away unnoticed more than two years earlier, Mansour was named Omar's successor. The Obama administration droned the genuine Mansour to death in May 2016 after concluding, correctly, that he was no peace partner.

Clinton's team did finally find a legitimate emissary—a man who fleeced the State Department by extracting further concessions but delivered nothing in return. That man was Syed Tayyab Agha, a personal representative of Mullah Omar. When State began talking with Agha in 2010, Omar was still alive, though it isn't clear that he was running the Taliban's day-to-day operations. The State Department was optimistic about talks with Agha, even giving him the nickname "A-Rod," like the baseball player Alex Rodriguez, because he was considered so valuable. Clinton's State Department quickly began to pursue "confidence-building measures" with "A-Rod." In this context, "confidence-building measures" was just diplospeak for "unilateral American concessions."

In *Hard Choices*, Clinton lists some modest "confidence-building measures" the United States wanted the Taliban to undertake. "We wanted the Taliban to make public statements disassociating themselves from al Qaeda and international terrorism and committing to participate in a peace process with [Afghan president Hamid] Karzai and his government," Clinton writes. That's it—nothing beyond some messages distancing the group from a terrorist organization that had killed thousands of Americans, and a vague promise to talk about peace with the Afghan government. The lowest of low bars. Yet no such statements were forthcoming, nor have there been any in the years since. If anything, the Taliban has more openly cherished its relationship with al Qaeda. In December 2016, the Taliban even released a video, Bond of Nation with the Mujahideen, which celebrated their ongoing alliance with Osama bin Laden's group. It didn't matter that the Taliban wouldn't rhetorically distance itself from al Qaeda, though, Clinton's State Department was willing to grant some of the group's key demands anyway.

Talking with the Taliban meant that Washington would be negotiating with terrorists. Indeed, some of the jihadists were formally designated as such by the U.N., a black mark that significantly limited their ability to travel outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Clinton's State Department was willing to fix that problem for the Taliban, by working to have terrorists redefined as non-terrorists. "As a first step, we agreed to begin working with the United Nations to remove a few key Taliban members from the terrorist sanctions list, which imposed a travel ban," Clinton writes. The State Department went even further. "Soon the U.N. Security Council agreed to split the Taliban and al Qaeda lists and treat them separately—a direct manifestation of the distinction drawn in my [February 2011] speech—which gave us considerably more flexibility," Clinton explains.

The former secretary of state further justified this bifurcation of the al Qaeda and the Taliban terror designation lists with a specious argument. Like Obama, Clinton drew a firm line of demarcation between al Qaeda and the Taliban, arguing it was only the former "who attacked us on 9/11," while the latter "were Afghan extremists waging an insurgency against the government in Kabul." Clinton claimed in *Hard Choices* that to "understand our strategy, it was

important for Americans to be clear about the difference."

In reality, there is no such clear difference. The Taliban harbored al Qaeda before 9/11 and continued to do so afterwards. Just days before the hijackings, the Taliban and al Qaeda launched a joint military offensive against the Northern Alliance. This maneuver, which included al Qaeda's assassination of Northern Alliance commander Ahmed Shah Massoud on September 9, 2001, was intended to weaken a key American ally in advance of the attacks on New York and Washington. Numerous pieces of evidence attest to the fact that al Qaeda has invested substantial resources in the Taliban-led insurgency in the years since then. Al Qaeda couldn't be any clearer about this, as its leaders' statements and official documents regularly state that the resurrection of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is their principal goal in South Asia. Elsewhere in *Hard Choices*, Clinton concedes that the Taliban "had close ties with al Qaeda," but this simple observation had to be denied to justify the new "peace process." Throughout her February 2011 speech, Clinton struggled to separate the two in the minds of her audience. She claimed the "Taliban and al Qaeda are distinct groups with distinct aims," but in the very next phrase conceded "they are both our adversaries and part of a syndicate of terror that must be broken." She also said the Taliban's militants had the opportunity to stop "fighting a losing struggle alongside al Qaeda in bombed-out caves"—an implicit recognition that they are, in fact, U.S. enemies with at least some of the same aims. Despite its specious reasoning, the Obama administration's revisionist history of the Taliban continues to hold great sway inside the U.S. government, according to senior officials who spoke with The Weekly Standard.

The Taliban had two other concessions it wanted from the United States. The Taliban requested permission to open a political office in Doha, Qatar, and asked for the release of several key commanders from the American detention facility at Guantánamo Bay. The Obama administration gave in on both. Despite being a nominal American ally, Qatar is one of the Taliban's most important foreign backers, providing a cozy environment in which Taliban fundraisers can solicit donations for the ongoing jihad. The U.S. government knew this when the Taliban requested a formal presence in Doha.

The Taliban broke away from the talks in 2012 and the United States was desperate to restart them in 2013. But first, the Taliban wanted its office in Doha. In *Directorate S*, Coll explains that American officials prepared a memorandum of understanding that was to be signed by President Obama and the emir of Qatar. The memo stipulated that the Taliban "could not command or control the insurgency in Afghanistan from the Qatar office," "issue propaganda from there," or raise funds. Crucially, the Taliban's Doha representatives would have to agree not to call themselves the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). The IEA was the Taliban's totalitarian regime, which ruled over all of Afghanistan prior to the U.S.-led invasion in 2001. By describing themselves as the IEA, the Taliban would be saying that the current Afghan government—America's chief ally in the war and its ostensible partner in the proposed good-faith negotiations—was illegitimate. General Douglas Lute, Obama's special assistant and senior coordinator for Afghanistan and Pakistan on the National Security Council, and his team proposed that the Taliban instead refer to the Doha facility as the "Political Office of the Afghan Taliban." As opening day came closer, according to Coll, Washington abandoned the memorandum of understanding because the "effort to finalize all the documents for the Qatar grand opening proved to be a grind." In its place, Obama penned a letter to Afghan president Hamid Karzai in which he offered the same guarantees the memo was supposed to have provided. Among them: The Taliban wouldn't call itself the IEA.



*Guests arrive for the opening of the Taliban office in Doha, June 18, 2013.*

FAISAL AL-TIMIMI / AFP / GETTY

"All along," Coll writes, "the idea had been that the Taliban would issue a public statement when the office in Qatar opened, repudiating Al Qaeda and terrorism in some

fashion." Jeff Hayes, a Defense Intelligence Agency analyst assigned to the National Security Council, even helpfully "copied and pasted language" from messages previously written in Mullah Omar's name. Hayes's new ghostwritten statement from Mullah Omar was to be issued by the Taliban on its "big day," the opening of its office in Doha.

On June 18, 2013, the Americans celebrated the Doha announcement as a watershed moment in U.S.-Taliban relations. An official brought champagne into the State Department to mark the occasion, which some viewed, according to Coll, as a "diplomatic breakthrough that might yet reduce Afghanistan's violence and end some of its suffering." That didn't happen. The Americans were humiliated.

The whole affair quickly proved to be, in Coll's words, a "fiasco" and "an episode of remarkable diplomatic incompetence." Al Jazeera had its cameras well positioned for the moment when the Taliban unveiled a sign that read: "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan." The IEA's flag flew high above the Doha office. "F—," Lute said. As Coll explains, the Taliban had "blatantly violated" the assurances Obama provided to Karzai, who subsequently "waved around the guarantee letter Obama had sent him, to illustrate that no guarantee of the United States could ever be trusted."

The Taliban didn't read Hayes's memo or any other statement renouncing terrorism. Mullah Omar had quietly died two months before, in April 2013. The Pakistanis, who presumably knew Omar was dead, didn't bother to tell the Americans. "None of the Americans involved" in the diplomatic effort "had a clue" about Omar's passing, Coll writes. The Taliban continued to play *Weekend at Bernie's* with Omar for two more years, only conceding in July 2015 that he was dead. Throughout this entire time, the Americans didn't know who the real leader of the Taliban was. It appears that Mullah Mansour—not the phony one who bilked America and its allies—was running the show behind the scenes the whole time.

The Taliban wasn't done extracting concessions. Agha, or "A-Rod," had made it clear throughout his talks with the Americans that the Taliban wanted certain commanders freed. "The Taliban's top concern seemed to be the fate of its fighters being held at Guantánamo Bay and other prisons," Clinton wrote in *Hard Choices*. "In every discussion about prisoners, we demanded the release of Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, who had been captured in June 2009. There would not be any agreement about prisoners without the sergeant coming home."

Though the proposed swap for Bergdahl arose during Clinton's tenure, which ended in early 2013, it wasn't finalized until May 2014. In exchange for Bergdahl, who subsequently pleaded guilty to deserting his fellow soldiers, five hardened jihadists were freed from Guantánamo and transferred to Qatar. Two of them were suspected of committing war crimes in Afghanistan prior to 9/11. According to leaked threat assessments prepared by Joint Task Force Guantánamo, all five had significant ties to al Qaeda prior to their detention.

During remarks delivered in the Rose Garden on May 31, 2014, President Obama heralded Bergdahl's imminent return. Obama thanked the governments of Afghanistan and Qatar for their support and assistance in arranging the Bergdahl-Taliban Five exchange. He also connected the move to the failed peace talks. "Going forward, the United States will continue to support an Afghan-led process of reconciliation, which could help secure a hard-earned peace within a sovereign and unified Afghanistan," Obama said. It was an announcement of American weakness—an uneven prisoner swap between the world's superpower and its jihadist enemies, touted by the president as a hopeful step in peace talks that existed only in the minds of his diplomats. Two and a half years later, when Obama left office, the reconciliation process was still moribund.

There is another humiliating twist in this story. Files recovered in Osama bin Laden's compound show that Syed Tayyab Agha—"A-Rod"—had been communicating with senior al Qaeda leaders around the same time he was meeting with the State Department's representatives. It will take some time to piece together the contents of this correspondence, which is scattered among multiple file folders. But one file, released by the CIA on November 1, 2017, reveals that Agha raised money for al Qaeda. The records show a transfer of proceeds from a donor (presumably in the Gulf) through Agha and into al Qaeda's coffers. It's no wonder the Obama administration and its allies in the intelligence bureaucracy fought hard to keep the files from public view.

The Obama administration's dance with the Taliban is a near-perfect picture of diplomatic failure: The Taliban dangled the prospect of talks to extract concessions while offering nothing of value in return. At first, the United States and its allies fell for Taliban impostors. Secretary Clinton abandoned America's preconditions for the talks, recasting them instead as the goals of an imagined "peace process." Just for the opportunity to talk, Clinton's State Department agreed to have some Taliban figures removed from the U.N.'s list of sanctioned terrorists and to split the Taliban and al Qaeda designation lists under the phony assertion that the groups are wholly separate. A Taliban emissary who raised funds for al Qaeda paved the way for the opening of a political office in Qatar, which the Taliban used to embarrass the United States. The Taliban also secured the release of five of its hardened commanders, three of whom served the organization at its highest levels prior to being detained at Guantánamo. Throughout all of this, the Taliban never issued a single statement renouncing al

Qaeda or terrorism—one of the few "confidence-building measures" sought by the American side.

In return, the Obama administration secured the release of Bowe Bergdahl—a deserter.

## A 'PEACE PROCESS' WITH THE TALIBAN

The Obama administration's attempts to negotiate with the Taliban will be remembered as among the most embarrassing episodes in the history of American diplomacy. So why is the Trump administration going down the same path?

It's a question worth exploring at length. But one answer suggests itself: Trump, like Obama, was never committed to winning in Afghanistan.

Incredibly, Trump's State Department has picked up where Obama's left off. Testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 20, Ambassador Alice Wells, the State Department's senior bureau official for South and Central Asian Affairs, presented an optimistic forecast. Wells conceded there would be "obstacles and unanticipated setbacks," but she nonetheless argued there is a "real opportunity this year to start an Afghan peace process that could lead to a durable settlement of the conflict."



*Taliban militants pose outside Jalalabad during a short-lived June 2018 ceasefire.*

NOORULLAH SHIRZADA / AFP / GETTY

Wells couldn't point to any concrete statements from the Taliban to this effect. (The group's public rhetoric is deeply problematic for anyone arguing that peace is around the corner.) She pointed to vague "signs that the Taliban's Pakistan-based leaders are debating the merits of joining a peace process." Wells claimed, hopefully, that the Taliban hadn't responded to Afghan president Ashraf Ghani's call for "unconditional talks" earlier this year. But that isn't really true. The Taliban has said, consistently and publicly, that Ghani's government, like Karzai's, is illegitimate. They have declared that they will not negotiate with the "puppet" regime. But the Taliban has reportedly engaged the Americans in recent months. Why wouldn't they? The jihadists are better negotiators. They expect to win.

Wells also restated Clinton's goals for the prospective talks, the same ones that were preconditions, until the Obama administration realized there wasn't any chance the Taliban would agree to them before a sit-down. "Our desired outcomes for any peace process are clear and have not changed," Wells testified. "The Taliban must renounce violence, break ties with al Qaeda, and accept the Afghan constitution—including its protections for women and minorities." Those were Hillary Clinton's "necessary outcomes" in February 2011, when the United States had approximately 100,000 troops in the field. The Taliban did not acquiesce then. There is no reason to think it will do so now, when there are fewer than 20,000 American soldiers in the country. Regardless, Wells has reportedly met with Taliban liaisons in recent weeks.

U.S. officials are, once again, seeing what they want to see. On June 7, President Ghani announced a unilateral ceasefire. The Americans gushed over the move, with General John Nicholson, who oversees the U.S.-led war effort, declaring it a "bold initiative for peace." The Taliban ordered its own short-lived ceasefire—lasting just three days, far shorter than Ghani's—but it was quick to say that this wasn't in response to the Afghan government's moves. In fact, the Taliban referred to the Afghan government's men as "domestic opposition forces"—meaning that they oppose the legitimate government, the Taliban's own Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Taliban's leaders quickly rejected Ghani's request to prolong the ceasefire, resuming its attacks on the "internal puppets." In the weeks that followed, the Taliban hunted down Afghan personnel and overran a handful of districts before going on the offensive in Ghazni. The ceasefire did prove, however, that the Taliban leads a unified fighting force, with command-and-control over foot soldiers throughout the country. This dispels the myth, common in Western analytic circles, that the group lacks a well-functioning hierarchy.

Some American officials, including General Nicholson, have claimed that the Taliban has offered its own roadmap for peace. They cite an open letter published by the Taliban's propagandists on February 14. That top U.S. officials

have chosen to depict this letter as a reason for hope suggests just how grim the situation really is. The letter includes multiple condemnations of the United States. The Taliban reiterates that its Islamic Emirate is the only "legitimate" authority and demands that the United States end its "illegitimate occupation." Only then, after America has left Afghanistan or committed itself to doing so, could there be "peaceful dialogue." In other words, the Taliban is willing to negotiate the terms of its own victory.

The Trump administration risks undermining the Afghan government, just as Obama-era officials did. Everyone involved in planning the talks insists that they be "Afghan-led"—a recognition that there is no end game for the war without a sovereign Afghan government in place. But the Taliban insists it will not negotiate with President Ghani or his liaisons. Thus, by talking with the Taliban directly and without Ghani's representatives present, American officials may be unintentionally strengthening the Taliban's claims on power.



*From left: Hibatullah Akhundzada, Mullah Mansour, and Siraj Haqqani*

Following the precedent set during the Obama years, the U.S. government continues to downplay the Taliban's relationship with al Qaeda. In June, the Defense Department released its latest congressionally mandated report on the war, "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan." The Pentagon report claims, despite abundant evidence to the contrary, that "there is no evidence of strategic ties between" the Taliban and al Qaeda, only some "lower and mid-level" cooperation. It's an absurd claim but it raises an obvious question: Why doesn't the Taliban just renounce al Qaeda then? The Obama administration begged it to do so for years. It would be simple for the Taliban to release a statement distancing itself from al Qaeda, even if it didn't mean it. This would be an easy way to extract still more concessions from the Americans. Yet the Taliban has not done it.

Why? Perhaps the relationship is more significant than the Pentagon wants us to think. Indeed, al Qaeda's alliance with the Taliban is the most strategic relationship Ayman al Zawahiri's organization has. In 2016, Zawahiri swore his personal fealty to the Taliban's emir, Hibatullah Akhundzada. This continued a longstanding tradition, as Osama bin Laden pledged his loyalty to Mullah Omar prior to the 9/11 attacks. Zawahiri also swore his allegiance to Mullah Omar and then to Omar's successor, Mullah Mansour. This blood oath is deadly serious for the jihadists. Thousands of al Qaeda members around the globe owe their loyalty to Akhundzada by virtue of Zawahiri's *bayat* (oath of allegiance) to the Taliban leader. Al Qaeda's men, operating everywhere from West Africa to South Asia, have publicly recognized Zawahiri and Akhundzada as their leaders. What could be more strategic than that?

As Zawahiri's *bayat* suggests, Akhundzada is a committed jihadist. In the summer of 2017, Akhundzada's son blew himself up in a "martyrdom" operation in southern Afghanistan. Yet some Trump administration officials believe they can forge peace by negotiating with representatives of a man who willingly sacrificed his child for the cause and has won the loyalty of al Qaeda's leaders.

There's more: The Taliban's No. 2 is Siraj Haqqani, a known al Qaeda ally. Osama bin Laden's files make it clear that al Qaeda has long cooperated with Haqqani and his men on Afghanistan's battlefields. This is not a low-level tie. Haqqani oversees the Taliban's military operations. The U.S. government has long known that Haqqani's men wear two hats, serving both the Taliban and al Qaeda. A series of terrorist designations by the U.S. government has exposed this overlap. In January, for instance, the Treasury Department designated Haqqani facilitator Gula Khan Hamidi as a terrorist, noting that he also worked with al Qaeda. Another jihadist designated by Treasury in January, Maulawi Inayatullah, has served the Taliban in various serious roles. He has been the "overall Taliban member responsible for attacks against Afghan and Coalition Forces in Kabul" and has also been in charge of the Taliban's operations in "multiple Afghan provinces." Treasury's analysts found that Inayatullah gave a "large sum of money" to al Qaeda.

There are numerous other ties one could cite along these lines. In recent weeks, Afghan forces have hunted down al Qaeda fighters supporting the Taliban's insurgency. And according to Afghan officials, the Taliban's massive assault on Ghazni earlier this month relied on foreign fighters, at least some of whom were presumably from al Qaeda's newest branch: Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent. The Pentagon report ignores this evidence in order to justify a settlement with the Taliban.

## AMERICA ADRIFT IN AFGHANISTAN

The United States lost its bearings in Afghanistan long ago. Some of the Taliban's most senior leaders escaped in late 2001, as did Osama bin Laden. They eventually regrouped and launched an insurgency that continues to engulf Afghanistan in violence. The Bush administration entered the war with a light footprint that was supposed to demonstrate the overwhelming technological superiority of American forces. The Taliban openly ridicules this view in its statements. The Bush administration added more soldiers to the fight over time, but the war effort was always secondary to other concerns.

President Obama and his advisers made a conscious decision to treat the Taliban as the Afghan government's enemy—not ours. In 2014, Obama unilaterally declared an end to America's combat role, a pronouncement that had to be reversed. During Obama's final years in office, the U.S. military also operated under absurdly restrictive rules of engagement. The American mission has been devoted, in large part, to training Afghans to fight and eventually defeat the Taliban. Think about it this way: America has been fighting a war in which it has often sought to avoid direct confrontation with its principal enemy.

During his confirmation hearing on June 19, Lieutenant General Austin S. Miller was asked by Senator Angus King if the Taliban is our enemy. Miller, who is assuming command of the U.S.-led war effort, struggled to respond. He noted that the "Taliban had previously hosted and tolerated al Qaeda," but claimed "they have now said that that would not be part of their future policy." Miller sourced his claim to "statements by them" but failed to offer supporting evidence. There is a reason for this: Taliban leaders have never said any such thing.

The United States has asked the Taliban to make such a statement for nearly a decade. If the group had ever said anything remotely like this, the U.S. government would have broadcast the development far and wide. It simply hasn't happened. The closest the Taliban has come is a statement claiming that it has "no agenda" to play "any destructive role in any other country" and it has "proven over the past seventeen years that we have not interfered in any other country." But this is a lie—Taliban-hosted al Qaeda training camps continue to allow Zawahiri's jihadists to operate throughout South Asia.

President Trump inherited this mess. It's understandable he'd want to wash his hands of it. But Trump has also had the opportunity to reform the American mission since early 2017. The president loosened the rules of engagement. The air campaign has expanded dramatically, with thousands more bombs being dropped than in years past. For the first time in years, for example, American and allied forces have been allowed to directly target the Taliban's extensive narcotics trafficking network.

But even under Trump, the U.S. military has not been fighting the Taliban like it is America's enemy. The additional troops deployed to Afghanistan in the last year have been focused on training and assisting Afghan forces. U.S. forces are not leading ground campaigns deep into the heart of Taliban country, at least not regularly. And the Afghans—constantly plagued by corruption, defections, and poor leadership—are not capable of taking the fight to the Taliban on their own. Afghanistan's counterterrorism and special forces have become more effective, but it is not enough. Not only have they failed to stymie the Taliban, they haven't neutralized a persistent Islamic State presence. The United States and Afghanistan have led a focused counterterrorism mission against Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's diehards, but they just won't die—not enough of them anyway. Despite numbering far fewer than the Taliban's fighters, the Islamic State's "martyrs" regularly strike in Kabul, Jalalabad, and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the Taliban is waiting to reclaim its Islamic Emirate. Akhundzada, recently told his men to prepare to rule over more ground in the near future. The jihadists likely view an American retreat as a foregone conclusion.

Though President Trump has been tougher on Pakistan than his predecessor, some of the Taliban's most senior leaders still patiently plot from the territory of our erstwhile ally. "We can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organizations, the Taliban, and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond," he said in his August 21, 2017, speech. "Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our effort in Afghanistan. It has much to lose by continuing to harbor criminals and terrorists."

In keeping with this stern warning, the Trump administration has withheld funds, designated additional Pakistan-based facilitators as terrorists, and chastised Pakistani officials for inaction. It is possible that this has had some effect behind closed doors, but it certainly hasn't changed Pakistan's overall behavior. Moreover, America is generally unwilling to target senior Taliban leaders inside Pakistan. The last time the United States killed a Taliban leader inside Pakistan was in May 2016. This safe haven has been crucial, allowing much of the Taliban's leadership to operate with impunity.

Whatever good those steps have done, our desperately seeking talks with terrorists—and setting aside facts on the ground to do so—emboldens America's enemies in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The Taliban can only view the Trump administration's attempts to negotiate as further evidence that the president's patience is running out. While it is a long shot, it may be the case that the Taliban is willing to agree to a Vietnam-style deal in which the United States is afforded an orderly withdrawal. If that happens, Americans should know this: Their leaders lost the original 9/11 war. ♦

# John Coltrane and the End of Jazz

*Putting his classic quartet's 'lost album' in its context.* BY DOMINIC GREEN

The Renaissance, taking man as the measure of all things, produced music for soloists. The Age of Revolutions, gestating democracy and the nation at arms, expressed its collectivism in orchestral music. The 20th century saw the triumph of capitalism, eventually, and the musical format of the market economy was the quartet. A quartet is the cheapest way to mimic an orchestra's range. Ringo plays the rhythm, Paul holds down the bass, John adds the chords, and George does the decorations. The logical consequence, economically if not musically, was for all four members to sing a bit and write their own tunes. Hence the Beatles, self-contained and self-commodified, with a little help from their friend Brian Epstein.

In the modern arts, the quartet is the format of late style. The economy here is more aesthetic than financial, though it might be significant that Beethoven, the first major composer to make a living without patronage, was also the composer who hit upon the quartet as the arena for technical speculation. The quartet format allows the artist to cover the bases of rhythm, harmony, and melody, but it also leaves plenty of open spaces. The laboratory of Beethoven's five last quartets incubates a century of harmonic experiment. T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* are a titration, an apocalypse that returns art to religion drip by drip, line by line.

The concept of "late style" was formulated in 1852 by Wilhelm von Lenz. He divided Beethoven's music into an early style, imitative of Haydn and Mozart; a middle style, grand and exhortatory like the *Eroica* Symphony; and a late style, more private than public, that meditates on eternal questions of form. This concept has the tripartite tidiness of the dialectic; it rests on the Hegelian assumption that musical biography, like secular history, is a progress towards spiritualization. In late style, the Romantic ego, as if preparing for death, turns inward and considers infinity. Inflated further in the politicized criticism of Theodor Adorno and Edward Said, the concept floats under Freudian cover in Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence."

Jazz was in a sense always a late style, a timekeeper's music out of time. In the 1920s, while jazz musicians were playing early show tunes and improvising with rudimentary harmony, the Second Viennese School was pushing ahead into total chromaticism and atonality, and Stravinsky, Milhaud, Prokofiev, and Ravel were experimenting with jazz's musical signature—its fixed pulse, syncopated rhythm, and emphasis on flattened thirds and sevenths. Jazz was modern long before Modern Jazz was named in the 1940s, for the harmonic modernity of bebop was the chromaticism of Liszt, Chopin, and Wagner. In the wider chronology of Western music, jazz's harmonic development is a long game of catch-up, finished too late—around 1972, when Miles Davis heard Karlheinz Stockhausen for the first time. Davis had already reached the same conclusions as the joyless German but without losing the funk.

No jazz musician incarnates the legend of late style more than the saxophonist John Coltrane. His early style is undistinguished; he was a bluesy sideman whose grasp of the instrument falls short of the reach of his ear. His middle style, stertorous and ambitious, began in his mid-1950s stint with Miles Davis's quintet. Coltrane in this period is still less melodious than Hank Mobley and less witty than Sonny Rollins, but his chops are catching up with his ear. Only Johnny Griffin has fleeter fingers and only Rollins can beat him for persistence. Coltrane thinks aloud and never stops thinking; he is the perfect foil for Davis, who is also ironic and intellectual, also latent with eroticism and violence, but who never shows his working, only the finished idea. Coltrane's sound waves are square and heavy, metallic and dark like lead. He is both implacable and lazy, like a bull elephant: You never know where the charge will take him, only that—as he himself admitted to Davis—once he gets going, he doesn't know how to stop.

Coltrane's late style emerged in his 1960s quartets. Now leading and writing for his own group, and newly clean of drink and drugs, he was finally able to pursue his vision and the possibilities of the music to the limits of form and expression—and ultimately beyond both. The further he went, the more ambitious and less accessible the music became, until it was incomprehensible to almost all of his audience and even to some of his closest collaborators. In the logic of modernism, further means better. But "faster" and "louder" aren't necessarily better, so why should "further" be the supreme critical value? To

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judge Coltrane's late-style art is, in an important sense, to judge modernism itself, and especially American modernism. And we have now an opportunity to listen afresh, with the release this summer of what may well be the last significant studio recordings of Coltrane's classic quartet, *Both Directions at Once: The Lost Album*.

Jazz is modernist music, and the jazz quartet the home chemistry kit of modernism. The experiments of Coltrane's 1960s quartets broke the mechanics of jazz's classical physics, with its show tunes, its blues, and its endless staircases of chords ascending in fourths. The title of *Both Directions at Once* alludes to a remark Coltrane made to his successor in Miles Davis's group, the tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter. Coltrane said he wanted to play as though jumping into the middle of a sentence, playing a song outward in both directions at once. The passage backward travels from complexity to simplicity; the passage forward travels from further complexity to the simplicity of a final restatement. The simultaneous execution of both moves evokes the mathematical backflips of 20th-century physics—principles of uncertainty and indeterminacy and relativity. "In my end is my beginning," as Eliot puts it in his rhythmic reflections on time and space in *Four Quartets*.

Coltrane's late style began on the legendary Davis album *Kind of Blue* (1959), and jazz began to die there too. Working in both directions at once, Coltrane erected ever more complex chordal ziggurats while also flattening the structures of the music back into the formless modal void. After departing the Davis group and signing as a solo artist to Atlantic Records, in 1960 Coltrane created the new chordal landscape of "Coltrane changes" with *Giant Steps*: Rather than returning to the home key by the traditional cycle of fourths, Coltrane shifted the tonal center by major thirds. Musicians call this challenge to mind, ear, and fingers the "Three Tonic" system.

This revolution had been incubating in plain sight, and in some very traditional places. Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" (1930), the *locus classicus* of the cycle of fourths that became a nervous tic in bebop, makes the major-third jump when it enters the bridge, only to return to the home key by a steady sequence of fourths. "Have You Met Miss Jones?" (Rodgers and Hart, 1937) and "I Remember You" (Victor Schertzinger and Johnny Mercer, 1941) also use major-third shifts. Coltrane himself experimented with major-third shifts in a 1956 recording with Davis, "Tune Up." In the 16-bar sequence of "Giant Steps," Coltrane made 10 major-third shifts, all set up with two-step chromatic substitutions in fourths, as if to remind us how far we have come. And he played this as fast as possible—too fast for most players: The tonal center changes about every eight beats and it starts to shift after only two beats. Just as your mind and ear find their balance, the harmonic floor gives way beneath your feet. Coltrane hammers through these changes with barely a pause for breath.

*Coltrane somehow found musicians capable of following him and meshing. His classic quartet—with drummer Elvin Jones, pianist McCoy Tyner, and bassist Jimmy Garrison—remains the heavyweight champion of jazz quartets.*

Jazz could not get any faster, but it could get louder and deeper. Somehow, the runaway Trane found like minds, capable of following him and meshing with each other. He now had the polyrhythmic fury of Elvin Jones on drums and the weirdly calm McCoy Tyner on piano. Coltrane had taken up the straight soprano saxophone, apparently because he liked Sidney Bechet, but perhaps also because its snake-charming sound fitted his growing interest in pushing the modal envelope into non-Western musics. Coltrane had the studio time and tape to play with, too, after having an unlikely hit in 1961 with a modal take on Richard Rodgers's "My Favorite Things," in which the rhythm section's heavy vamp and Coltrane's oriental noodling evoke images of the von Trapp family on the nod in Marrakesh. The addition later that year of bassist Jimmy Garrison stabilized the classic Coltrane quartet. This is the unit that we hear on *Both Directions at Once*, and it remains the heavyweight champion of jazz quartets.

Impulse Records calls *Both Directions at Once* a lost album, but it isn't an album and it wasn't really lost. Nor, despite Coltrane's interstellar motifs and spatial excursions, has it fallen from the heavens. It has emerged from the attic of Coltrane's first wife, Naima, as an "audition tape" whose master tape was either lost or destroyed. It was recorded all in one day at the studio of Rudy Van Gelder. In the fifties, Van Gelder had created the Blue Note sound by building a high-ceilinged extension to his house in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, nailing the drums to the floor and running a jazz group through spring-reverb amplifiers the size of refrigerators. Apart from recording Coltrane's only Blue Note album, *Blue Train* (1958), Van Gelder also recorded several Coltrane albums for Prestige Records, whose less-polished sessions were a notorious source of cash for drugs.

In 1961, Impulse Records bought Coltrane's contract from Atlantic and Coltrane and Van Gelder were reunited. Like candidates for the fifth Beatle, there are several candidates for fifth member of Coltrane's quartet. Coltrane even expanded it into a five-piece with a couple of prospects, saxophonists Eric Dolphy and Pharoah Sanders—the former a subtle altoist who combined Coltrane's changes with Adderley's swing, the latter a rootin', tootin' tenor honking his way into psychedelic religion. But Van Gelder was more important to the quartet's development. His church-like space was just right for Coltrane's increasingly

spiritual aspirations, much as Studio 2 at Abbey Road was to become ideal for the Beatles' orchestral ambitions.

*Both Directions at Once* lacks the finished Van Gelder sound, but you can still hear the Van Gelder space. You can also hear the moment in time, which is what jazz is all about. This is not a real "album," since it is not a premeditated sequence of songs. In his liner notes, Sonny Rollins compares the recovery of the session tape to "finding a new room in the Great Pyramid." It is—but the room is a storeroom, or an attic. The music stands in relation to Coltrane's official studio and live recordings as Keats's letters do to his verse. It illuminates not just the mind of its creators but also the meaning of their work. Like Coltrane with his changes, *Both Directions* pushes the concept of late style to breakdown.

As the meaning of each note depends on its harmonic setting and its placement in the chain of melody, so the significance of this newly released recording derives in large part from its place in Coltrane's chronology. On March 6, 1963, the day *Both Directions* was recorded, the quartet was approaching the end of a two-week stand at the Birdland jazz club in New York City. That night's performance would be recorded, and three tunes from those tapes would be issued in April 1964 on the *Live at Birdland* album. (A fourth, "Vilia," was eventually included in the *Live at Birdland* CD reissue.)

More broadly, *Both Directions* was recorded during a stretch of time in which Coltrane made a trio of albums touching the past and the future of music. On *Ballads*, recorded in late 1961 and early 1962 but not released until March 1963, Coltrane palpates the most romantic of formats, then turns the diaphanous material of pop harmony inside out, revealing a scorched metallic skeleton. On *Duke Ellington & John Coltrane*, recorded in September 1962 and released in February 1963, Coltrane made an extended and respectful bow to the first and last jazz composer. And the day after recording *Both Directions*, Coltrane's quartet was booked into Van Gelder's studio to begin recording an album with the crooner Johnny Hartman. The motive for this trio of retrospective records may have been producer Bob Thiele's attempt to find a hit to follow "My Favorite Things." But that doesn't really matter. The Coltrane quartet is playing an art form in the process of self-dissolution. From phrase to phrase, and sometimes within the same phrase, Coltrane teeters between homage and sabotage, articulacy and noise.




*The cover of* Both Directions at Once

The passage of time allows us to hear *Both Directions at Once* in both directions at once. We look back and trace Coltrane's development from bop to modal to free jazz. We look forward and anticipate the quartet's further development in *Crescent* (1964) and even its final expression, *A Love Supreme* (1965), the spiritual concept album that leads to the transcendentally incoherent music of the last two years of Coltrane's life. And we cannot but wonder whether Coltrane's late style really expresses the same drive towards an apogee that Lenz heard in Beethoven or whether the discharge of energy fizzled away, and if so, when.

*Both Directions at Once* contains seven tracks from the daytime session in Englewood Cliffs, with a further seven alternative takes on a second CD in the deluxe edition. The alternative takes are only a little less superfluous than usual. We hear Coltrane varying his solos and the trio responding, but it is clear why the album's compilers, record producer Ken Druker and Coltrane's saxophonist son Ravi, relegated the alternative takes to the second disc. Further, two of the seven "master" tunes, "Nature Boy" and "Impressions," are themselves alternative takes on recordings Coltrane released during his lifetime.

"Nature Boy," written by the proto-hippie Eden Ahbez and most famously recorded in 1948 by Nat King Cole, is fresh and lively, with a feel anticipating the *Crescent* sessions of early 1964. But the version we already have from early 1965, recorded after the watershed

of *A Love Supreme*, and with Art Davis on bass, is more developed and will remain definitive. The value of this early version is its hint that *A Love Supreme* is not the revolutionary breach that the critics describe but rather a cohesive summary of the developments that Coltrane had pursued since 1960—an end, not a beginning.

Opinion varies as to the definitive version of "Impressions," Coltrane's splicing of the modal sequence of Miles Davis's "So What" with a theme from the composer Morton Gould. In the 1961 *Live in Stockholm* recording, Coltrane developed his solo with unusual economy from mellifluousness to fury, only for Dolphy's alto to pour like honey from the rock. In July 1963, the quartet, with Roy Haynes subbing on drums, recorded an incandescent, chaotic version at the Newport Jazz Festival. In December 1963, recording a live set for Ralph Gleason's *Jazz Casual* TV show, Coltrane looked at his sax, played five quick quavers, and the trio crashed into gear, already in the groove at top speed, to give one of the most synergetic recorded performances in jazz history. The version here, and the variations on the bonus disc, add little to our understanding of "Impressions."

Now for the originals—two tracks that haven't been heard elsewhere and have been named here for the slate numbers assigned by the studio producer. "Original 11383" is a fast and furious blues number. The chord changes are so heavily overwritten with modality that among the early reviewers, only the pianist Ted Gioia noticed it was a blues piece at all. Again, the suspicion that *A Love Supreme* is a summing-up is hinted at by the way the pushed emphases in "Original 11383" anticipate "Pursuance," the third section of *A Love Supreme*. Meanwhile, "Original 11386" is Latin-inflected, with the stops and structures of fifties hard bop and Coltrane pushing against form with slow belligerence. As you can see the career of Henry Moore foreshadowed in a single Picasso sculpture, so you can hear in Coltrane's soloing on this track a foreshadowing of the calmer, melodious Pharoah Sanders of the 1980s, in particular Sanders's "Africa."

As early as 1961, pianist McCoy Tyner had taken to dropping out when Coltrane's solos slipped the bonds of chordal harmony. Bassist Garrison often followed when he could no longer find the tonic note. This produced epic saxophone and drum duels between Coltrane and Elvin Jones that, curiously, anticipate the rock theatrics of Pete Townshend and Keith Moon, or Jimi Hendrix and Mitch Mitchell. On "One Up, One Down," the modal pounding is so heavy that Tyner drops out at the one-minute mark. In 1965, Tyner and Jones were to drop out of the quartet entirely, with Tyner unable to find a niche for his chords and Jones, who understood the difference between music and "a lot of noise," convinced that Coltrane had slipped into making the latter.

Tyner's tight, swinging piano on "Slow Blues" is firmly in the fifties, and this pulls Coltrane back into his Prestige Records style. You can also hear how the quartet's spacious ambiance and emotional intensity allowed Coltrane to recharacterize blues phrasing as spiritual questing. The suspended 11th chord calls for redemption by demanding resolution; the sharp 11th is the discord of the soul in torment.

The most valuable track here is the oldest composition. "Vilia" is a theme from Franz Lehár's *Merry Widow*. The legend of Coltrane as avant-garde visionary sits uneasily with his pursuit of Habsburgian jollities. But the chronology of jazz sits awkwardly with the modernist ideal of the avant-garde. Jazz harmony developed chronologically but, unlike the developers of classical harmony, the developers of jazz harmony lived in the same period. The generations could and did play together, as Ellington and Coltrane did in 1962. On "Vilia," the quartet minds its manners as it had done on *Ballads* and *Duke Ellington & John Coltrane*, and as it would do the next day with Johnny Hartman. Coltrane's tenor solo follows the ancient course, the conventional and very difficult path of finding phrases with one foot in the blues and the other in the chord changes. You can sense the storm that might break out at any moment, but Coltrane's restraint intensifies the impact.

There are many testimonies to American loneliness, and the blues might be the greatest of them. There are fewer testaments to American compendiousness. Coltrane's quartet is the *Moby-Dick* of American popular music, with Coltrane still wailing in the depths when he died in 1967. By then, he would no longer be playing popular music. After *A Love Supreme*, his music bore little relation to the folk music and show tunes from which it had sprung. It became abstract and theoretical, and though it abounds in sincere emotion, there is something false about its donning of mock-African and mock-Asian styles, something overly plodding and earnest in a pastiching that Ellington had done with such light and ironic style in the Cotton Club. Unbounded space becomes mere formlessness.

The English saxophonist Ronnie Scott used to tell a joke about a man who goes to a pet shop in search of a singing parrot. The proprietor turns out to have three in stock. The first and cheapest parrot is a richly plumed specimen that can sing all of Louis Armstrong's solos. The second is in equally splendid condition, but costs more, because he can sing all of Charlie Parker's solos. The third is blind, can barely stand on his perch, and has lost most of his feathers. But he costs more than the other two birds combined.

"What does this one sing?" the customer asks.

"I don't know," says the proprietor, "but the other two call him 'Maestro.'"

Most of the people who play jazz view Coltrane's late period like the proprietor regards his parrot, with baffled respect. We see how he expressed the inner logic of the music, because we have the luxury of hindsight. We applaud the giant steps of harmonic invention that took him there—and admire the quasi-religious devotion that got and kept him there. But hardly any of us go there, and even most saxophonists only visit. The late style of jazz isn't at the heart of our repertoire in the way that Beethoven's late quartets and Eliot's *Four Quartets* are in their fields. For most jazz musicians, it's Coltrane's middle style, rooted in the Modern Jazz of the early forties to

the late fifties, that strikes the desired balance between form and content, tradition and deviation. We talk about the "Coltrane changes" more than we play them, and we tend to play them in their milder iteration by Richard Rodgers.

People who write about jazz tend to place the late style at the top of the pile—but what do they know? Most of them cannot play the music and many of them cannot understand the technicalities. Lacking practical understanding, they fall back on fashion and the hagiographic assumption that if progress is good, then late is great. I am not alone in feeling that, as works of art, Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh are more successfully realized than his Ninth. Nor am I alone in finding the formal asceticism of *Four Quartets* less satisfying than the grab-bag of *The Waste Land*. I have also noticed that when someone claims that *Finnegans Wake* is better than *Ulysses*, you should stand by for an act of intellectual imposture. The story goes that Coltrane was using LSD after 1965. If so, then the overreach and incoherence of his final music, and his mingling with admiring but inferior talents like Alice Coltrane, the Yoko Ono of jazz, suggest that Coltrane might be the sixties' first and foremost acid casualty, flailing out rather than flaming out, the peak of his late style already behind him.

The test of a jazz musician isn't a facility for imitating terminal Coltrane, but for emulating the blues, finding an individual voice within the chordal and harmonic framework, and playing it with feel. That is what Coltrane and his late quartet are doing on much of *Both Directions at Once*, though they're doing it at such intellectual altitude that you don't notice it most of the time. But the blues is what they're playing, even when they've exchanged chords for modes. That you can't tell half the time shows that this is the sound of an art form at its furthest extension, which is also the moment of its collapse.

The fact that this 55-year-old recording is the year's most significant jazz release tells you all you need to know about the health of jazz in 2018. The only real argument is about the clinical symptoms of jazz's death and when it happened. It would be wrong to claim that jazz died with Coltrane in 1967, the year that rock cemented its takeover at Monterey. For one thing, many of jazz's inventors were still going. Louis Armstrong, the first of the master soloists, had his biggest hit, "What a Wonderful World," in 1967. Duke Ellington, the Debussy of the big band, was in 1967 preparing the second of his three "Sacred Music" concerts. And in 1967, jazz still contained the seeds of at least two of its final evolutions. The trumpeters Miles Davis and Donald Byrd had yet to form their electric bands, with Davis heading toward bleary oblivion and Byrd toward the dance floor. But Armstrong's pop hit was orchestral,

*The fact that this 55-year-old recording is the year's most significant jazz release tells you all you need to know about the health of jazz in 2018.*

Ellington's band always had been orchestral, and the crowded studios and thick textures of Davis's *In a Silent Way* and Byrd's *Places and Spaces* were, in their disorderly ways, orchestral too. None of this music was played by acoustic quartets.

The quartet had been the standard working unit in jazz since the 1930s. But by 1965, when Coltrane recorded the group improvisation of *Ascension* with 10 musicians and no sheet music, the quartet could no longer support the music's technical and textural development. Nor could acoustic instruments. With the exception of the Hammond organ and Leslie speaker, jazz had electrified in order to make the stringed instruments audible rather than to reshape the sonic palette. Miles Davis tipped the balance towards electricity in 1968, with *Miles in the Sky*, and he kept tipping it, until he was playing through a wah-wah pedal with an all-electric rock band.

The assumption that it was the musician's task to develop the music reveals how deeply jazz was soaked in the forms and assumptions of European art music. A Balkan folk musician or a West African griot doesn't seek to push his people's music forward technically but to imitate it and preserve their sonic memory. But a jazz musician, like a classical composer, has the modern itch. Imitation is not enough; he must go beyond his sources. He pursues formal development for its own sake and believes in progress. Jazz didn't exactly die with Coltrane, but he certainly helped to kill it. No one (apart from Miles Davis) read its inner logic so clearly. No one did more to pulverize show tunes and the blues into stardust. Arguably no one did more to reunite secular Western art with religion, which is where secular Western art came from and what it had been striving to rejoin ever since it left. And no one (again apart from Miles Davis) did it better.

Coltrane's late style peaks between 1961 and 1963, when he can make and unmake the music with equal facility. The rest should have been silence, but the inner logic of the music's development made it noise. He crossed that threshold six months after the *Both Directions* session. In September 1963, Klansmen firebombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four black girls. Coltrane's response, "Alabama," is a mournful, angry dirge whose phrases evoke the cadences of Martin Luther King Jr. The version that Coltrane's quartet recorded at Birdland in November 1963 is the last blues, the end of jazz in its beginning. After "Alabama," jazz would never again be so close to its origins, while its sound would only get further away from them.

So *Both Directions at Once* sounds both antediluvian in form and avant-garde in content. In March 1963, three weeks after the Beatles have recorded their first album, an acoustic quartet wrestles with harmonies and values that Elvis and Chuck Berry have already consigned to the past. As this recording approaches the summit of late style, it becomes the apogee of modernism's last style. For it is a sad fact of musical history that after Coltrane, there was nothing left to say on the saxophone. But Kenny G said it anyway. ♦



**Eugène Delacroix, *Crouching Tiger* (1839)**

B&A

# Revolutionary with a Pencil

*We remember Delacroix for his paintings, but he transformed modern drawing as well.* **BY ERIC GIBSON**

In September, the Met will open a retrospective exhibition of the French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Organized by the Louvre in Paris, where it broke all prior attendance records for a special exhibition after opening in March, it will be the first in-depth look in more than half a century at the career of the man widely considered the father of modern art.

A kind of teaser exhibition, "Devotion to Drawing," which opened in July, will extend into the first half of the paintings retrospective. Why not wait and have it up concurrently? I don't know for sure, but I suspect the head start was intended to highlight a too-little-known aspect of Delacroix's work that might otherwise have been overshadowed amid such big-boned canvases as *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), a *Götterdämmerung* scene of the last Assyrian king calmly overseeing the slaughter of his courtiers prior to his own demise. It was a wise choice. This is a gem of a show that provides a succinct, engaging introduction to the artist and a revelatory look at Delacroix the draftsman, among whose achievements was to reinvent drawing for the modern era.

**Devotion to Drawing**
*The Karen B. Cohen Collection of Eugène Delacroix*
Metropolitan Museum of Art
through November 12

Organized by Ashley E. Dunn, an assistant curator in the Met's department of drawings and prints, the show is drawn from a major gift to the museum of Delacroix works on paper. It comprises over 100 items: early student pieces, travel and preparatory sketches, copies of the masters, moody interiors of a Benedictine abbey in Normandy owned by his cousin, and a glowing pastel study of a sunset, a sky study worthy of those done by his British contemporary John Constable, an artist Delacroix admired.

Not many artists could withstand comparison with Michelangelo, the exhibition of whose drawings at the Met last fall still stands vividly in the memory. Delacroix does, however, in part because this is a very different kind of show. Michelangelo's personality—his outsize genius, capacity for invention, and seemingly limitless output—dominated that exhibition. By contrast it is drawing itself that reigns here: its capacity for a wide range of personal expression and the way the particular qualities of each medium—pencil, ink, and pastel—contribute to a work's emotional impact.

Like other aspiring artists of his day, Delacroix began his instruction in the traditional manner, by attending an art academy where he drew from the live model and absorbed the lessons of academic classicism—notions of ideal beauty and proportions inherited from antique art and the Renaissance—against which he and later artists would ultimately rebel. Some of these early figure poses and *écorché* studies of musculature feature in the exhibition, and they show how quickly he mastered human anatomy and complex attitudes.

Copying was also part of the curriculum of the day, one to which Delacroix responded with such enthusiasm that, frustrated by the limited selection of images available at the academy, he signed up to gain regular access to the prints and drawings department at the Bibliothèque Nationale, making copying the primary source of his artistic education. He believed it provided the real foundation of an education, since you learned not only the artist's formal language but different drawing techniques and approaches, a point the exhibition makes extremely well in its juxtaposition of his copy of an image by Raphael with the original.

Well, not exactly the original:

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

*Eric Gibson is the Arts in Review editor of the* Wall Street Journal.

Delacroix worked from a book of engravings by the British artist Thomas Vivares that contains one showing four male nudes from a Raphael fresco in the Vatican, Michelangelesque in their dynamic, twisting poses and pronounced musculature. The bodies are described in tight, sometimes broken outlines, the interiors modeled with crosshatchings of various densities and lengths to endow the figures with a feeling of solidity, of three-dimensionality, of being situated in space. The process—drawing itself—is subordinated to the creation of the image. In his version, *Combat of Nude Men, After Raphael* (ca. 1823), Delacroix would seem to have copied Raphael/Vivares down to the last detail, including a passage in the source image where some crosshatching defining a part of the thigh extends beyond the leg onto the white of the page.

Yet, as the rest of the exhibition shows, in his copy Delacroix seems to have wanted to see how much more could be done with this particular approach, just how much more expressive this way of handling line could be for its own sake. So while contour lines continue to define the form, the interior modeling is much looser and freer, with more space between the individual strokes or hatch marks. Overall there is less emphasis on creating a credible illusion of human figures in space than on exploring and exploiting the possibilities of line.

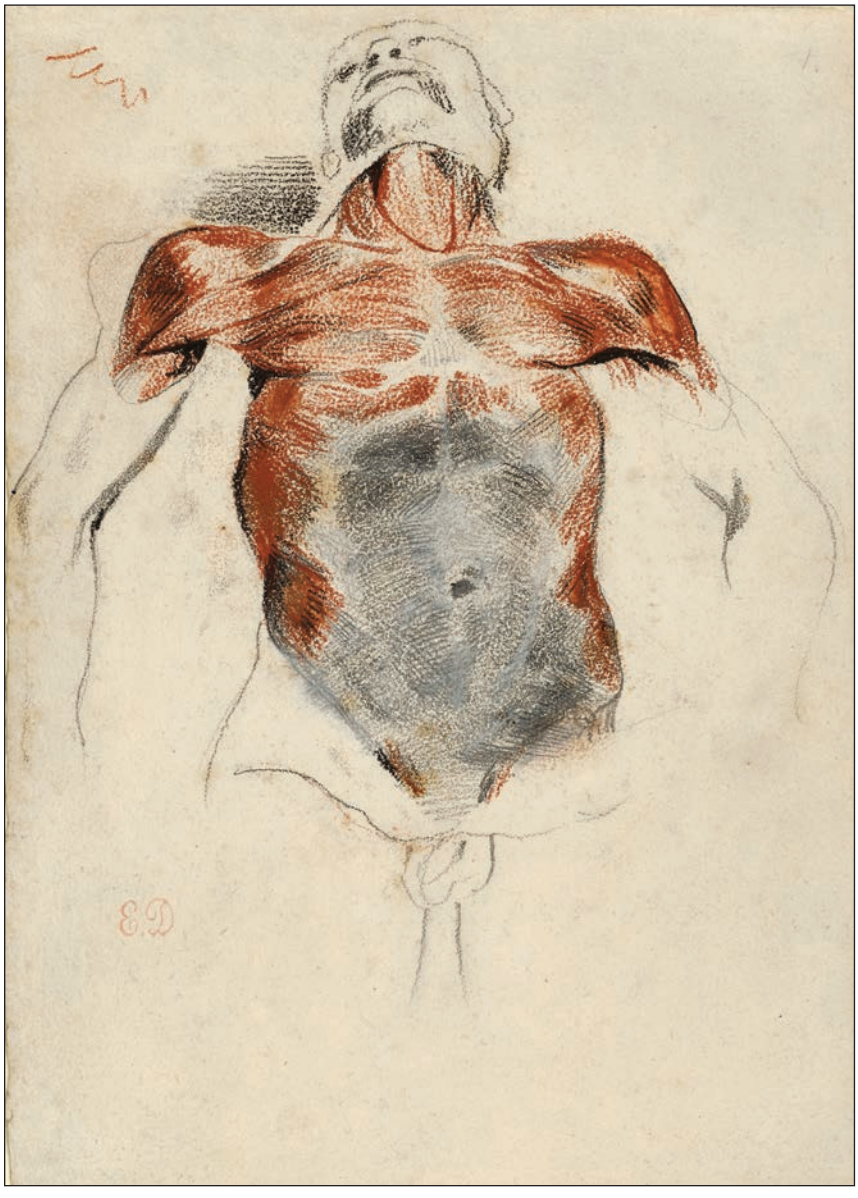
Raphael was a lifelong inspiration, but Peter Paul Rubens was, as Dunn writes in the excellent catalogue, "a kindred spirit," and here you can see exactly why. The three sheets of falling, twisting, and tumbling figures copied in the early 1820s from the Fleming's *The Fall of the Damned* (1620) point directly to the Sardanapalus painting of a few years later. Delacroix, who was at once a revolutionary and a conservative, saw in Rubens a way of breaking free of the expressive straitjacket that was academic classicism to move into new areas of feeling, while keeping faith with the traditions of the past.



*Delacroix's* Combat of Nude Men, After Raphael *(ca. 1823)*

In 1832 Delacroix traveled to North Africa and Spain, and the roughly dozen works in this part of the show reveal him to have been a voracious and acute observer. They aren't records of views and vistas so much as notations of details seen, probed with a pencil, and thereby committed to his visual memory. One sheet has several quick sketches of a Moroccan man's outfit, another is a watercolor detail of a wall decorated with tiles complete with pencil notations naming the colors. Still another is a sheet with more than 20 studies of Arab physiognomy. It is an exciting display, offering that rare thing in an exhibition, a glimpse of the raw materials of an artist's subsequent creations, in this case such seminal paintings as *The Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* (1834), a harem scene that would later bewitch both Henri Matisse and, especially, Pablo Picasso.

If there's a Delacroix *Mona Lisa*—a work with which he's identified above all others—it's probably *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), in which Marianne, the personification of the French nation, holds the tricolor aloft and, bare-breasted, urges a crowd of charging revolutionaries onward amid an array of prostrate corpses. There are preparatory studies for this painting—ink drawings of the fallen—as well as others. But the ones that command the most attention are what the artist called his *premières pensées* (first thoughts), rapid ink sketches capturing the earliest iteration of an idea. The central image in *Studies of a Horse and Rider for 'Heliodorus Driven from the*



*An* écorché*—a depiction of musculature—of a cadaver, in chalk and graphite (1828?)*

*Temple'* (1849-50), for a mural commission in the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, is an equestrian subject like no other. Horse and what there is of the rider are rendered in short, sharp, calligraphic ink strokes, as is *The Giaour on Horseback* (1824-26), showing a character, in this case a Venetian horseman, from a Byron poem. Both are executed with a freedom that makes the liberties taken in the earlier Raphael copy seem positively tame by comparison. Line is no longer purely descriptive. Indeed, it is so hardly at all. Instead the various strokes and marks operate like so many independent vectors of energy, out of whose collective action an image emerges.

Though more resolved than those, *Crouching Tiger* is in a similar vein. Beginning very early on, Delacroix spent hours drawing in the zoo in the Jardin des Plantes, Paris's botanical garden, and his mastery of animal anatomy is on display in many wonderful images in this show. Don't miss, for example, *A Lion in Full Face* (1841), wherein the king of beasts has been reduced to essences: staring eyes, snout, and mane, this last little more than a halo of wiggly lines.

In *Crouching Tiger*, Delacroix vividly captures the tension of a cat poised to strike: the arch of its back, the swirl of its tail, its head thrust out and jaws apart, and particularly the positions of the front paws. But it is the way he does so that makes this the unforgettable work of art it is. The artist has applied the ink using both pen and brush, the former to model the animal's body with quick crosshatchings, the latter doing most of the work and in two very different ways. A thin, fluid, concise line defines the overall form of the beast and hints at the speed at which the artist must have worked. Meanwhile, broad, thick, juicy strokes of ink model back, shoulders, and hind parts, while at the same time suggesting the cat's pattern of stripes. Here we sense Delacroix reveling in the viscosity of the ink and the contrast between these dark, heavy passages and the lighter, linear ones. Part of what gives this work its power is that the image and the means used to realize it are held in perfect equilibrium.

In works such as these, Delacroix invents the modern drawing. The old aim of creating the illusion of three-dimensional form in space in which the medium was simply the means to an end and the sheet of paper nothing more than the ground or surface upon which it was inscribed gives way to a new impulse, one that set drawing on a path of renewal and revitalization. Beginning with Delacroix, line, the medium used to lay it down, and even the blank areas of the paper itself acquire an independent aesthetic life, as integral to the expressive effect of the finished work as the image they create. Vincent van Gogh's scenes and portraits composed of reed-pen stipplings and scratchings, Edgar Degas's heavily worked pastels of ballerinas, Auguste Rodin's pencil-and-wash drawings from the model where the figure seems untethered to gravity, Matisse's drawings and etchings of women and plants where contour lines both define a form and float freely in a space of their own creation—these and many more trace their lineage back to Delacroix's liberating actions, now spectacularly laid out at the Met. ♦

B&A

# Student of the Game

*Family and hard work have made Frances Tiafoe a rising tennis star to watch.* **BY TOM PERROTTA**




*Frances Tiafoe competing in the Canadian Open (the Rogers Cup) in Toronto on August 9*

JULIAN AVRAM / ICON SPORTSWIRE / GETTY

Four years ago, tennis prodigy Frances Tiafoe was profiled in a long and excellent feature in the *Washington Post*. The article, written by Liz Clarke, laid out Tiafoe's entire life from birth to teenage years with respect and care and asked an essential question: Could this boy make it as a pro in tennis, one of the most difficult—and unpredictable—sports in the world?

Today, Tiafoe has, for a 20-year-old, done more than anyone could have hoped. After a third-round performance at Wimbledon in July, he is now ranked number 42 in the world; only four Americans rank higher. He also won a round at the Citi Open in Washington, D.C., and two rounds at the Masters event in Toronto, the Canadian Open, including one against Milos Raonic, once a Wimbledon finalist. Tiafoe hopes to do better than he has in the past at the U.S. Open, which begins August 27. He has never won a main-draw match in New York but should have a better chance this year.

For the first time in his career, Tiafoe has a winning season. Once scrawny, he's now thick in his 6-foot-2 frame and a bigger hitter—on all strokes—than he was before. In his brief career, Tiafoe has earned more than $1.6 million in prize money. That's not a huge amount in this expensive sport, where coaches, travel, and training can cost a great deal. There are no guarantees, either, like those enjoyed by baseball or basketball players who have signed contracts: In tennis, if you perform poorly or suffer from an injury you make no money. Still, for a 20-year-old, what Tiafoe has accomplished so far is promising. He isn't bragging about it, but when asked, he'll tell you that his success is no accident. The young man has worked as hard as anyone in tennis has by his age.

"I told [my family] from when I was about 11 or 12 years old, this is what it's going to be and you guys just have to sit back and wait for it," Tiafoe told me in a recent interview. "My dad always believed me. My mom, she wanted me to go to college and then after that you could do what you want. I said, 'It's probably not going to go down like that.' … There was always a purpose in what I did on the court because at the end of the day, my parents, they sacrificed for me and my brother. I had to do it for them."

Tiafoe's parents are from Sierra Leone and met in Maryland. Alphina, his mother, worked as a nurse; his father, Frances Sr., did whatever odd jobs he could find. One was fortunate: helping to build the Junior Tennis Champions Center in a suburb of Washington, D.C. His efforts were so appreciated that Mr. Tiafoe was hired full-time to keep the place in shape. When he worked at night, the young Frances Jr. and his twin brother, Franklin, slept there for the evening.

Both boys played tennis early but only Frances became obsessed. By the time he was 8 he had a full-time coach at the center. By the time he was 15, he became the youngest competitor ever to win the Orange Bowl, a prestigious event for talented juniors. Not long after, he also won the Easter Bowl.

Despite all this, there were worries about Tiafoe's future. Some observers questioned his style. His forehand had a clear hitch. His serve didn't have a lot of power and looked stiff rather than smooth. Sure, all that could work among juniors, but not against pros. Weaknesses, even small ones, cost more at the top of tennis, like in baseball for a hitter who can't react to a 98-mph fastball. And then there were the stakes: An American man hasn't won a Grand Slam title since Andy Roddick won the U.S. Open in 2003. Could Tiafoe withstand the attention and pressure?

Luckily, Tiafoe seems to thrive under pressure, which is no surprise knowing all his family has been through. As for how he plays, in reality tennis doesn't work the way many fear. There are rules and popular

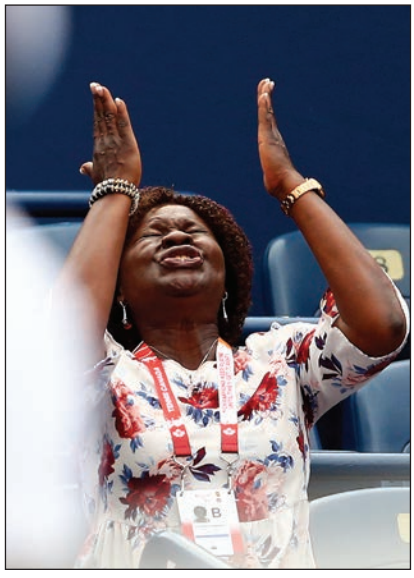
*Tom Perrotta writes about sports for the* Wall Street Journal, FiveThirtyEight, *and other publications.*




*Above, twins Franklin (left) and Frances Tiafoe, then 16, working on homework in their modest home in a suburb of Washington in 2014. Below, Alphina Tiafoe reacts in dismay after her son misses a shot against Milos Raonic in the Canadian Open on August 8.*

styles, but also many exceptions. No one would want a student to serve like John McEnroe did, with his legs far apart and his body facing backwards as he tosses the ball and then twists forward. Stefan Edberg had a forehand that looked like it blocked the ball, not hit it. Monica Seles, one of the finest women players in history, hit both her forehand and her backhand with two hands, a technique that few coaches would consider. When Rafael Nadal won his first French Open in 2005, many observers thought he wouldn't last for long. His forehand, with its speed and an extreme upward motion that looked like no other, seemed to bode shoulder and wrist injuries. He ran more than anyone in matches and practiced with an intensity no one else could sustain. Yet here he is, now 32 and the winner of 17 Grand Slam titles, more than anyone but Roger Federer. Like the two of them, Tiafoe is obsessed with the sport.

"He loves competition," said Ray Benton, the chief executive of the Junior Tennis Champions Center. "And the most important thing, he's a good guy with good values. I think the thing that stands out on court is he's joyful. He's determined but he's happy. He has a great smile. He loves being



out there. I think he has the potential to go all the way."

John Isner, now the top-ranked American in men's tennis, commented on some of Tiafoe's strengths after a tough win over him two years ago. "He's got wheels; he's got the hands; he's got shots on both sides," Isner said. "His backhand is world-class. His backhand return is world-class. He was handling my serve better than anyone really, maybe outside of Novak [Djokovic]. I mean, he was really on it. His forehand's great."

Yes, Tiafoe has speed and strokes that can be deadly, but his chief strength, surprisingly for a player still relatively young, is his wisdom. His ability to monitor his opponents and then make adjustments to attack them is superb. Tiafoe—who once said, "I like the cat-and-mouse points"—was not just learning to smash the ball when he was a boy but studying the game with care.

"I'm a pretty good problem solver," he said. "I'm very aware of what's going on."

Last year, Tiafoe played Federer in the first round of the U.S. Open, inside Arthur Ashe Stadium with the roof closed. Federer, returning from an aching back earlier in the summer, struggled. Tiafoe went for it and was wonderful to watch. Even though he lost in five sets, the match offered more evidence of his promising future.

"I always dreamed of being on center court, playing the best in the world," Tiafoe said. "It finally happened so I was ready for it."

Back in 2008, Grigor Dimitrov, then 17, took a set off Nadal in Rotterdam. With his smooth forehand and one-handed backhand, he made everyone compare him with a young Federer. That year he won the Wimbledon junior championship and the U.S. Open junior event too. Everyone was sure he would be a wonderful pro, and he seemed to progress every year. Last year, Dimitrov reached the highest rank of his career, number 3 in the world. But he has never played in a Grand Slam final as a pro. In all, Dimitrov has won eight career titles. He has made more than $15 million. For Tiafoe, this would be impressive, but he wants more—not just for himself but for his family.

"I still have a long way to go, but I said, 'Look, I'm going to change everybody's life,'" Tiafoe told me. "'I'm going to buy you all a house, I'm going to do X, Y, Z, and everybody is going to live nice and at the end of my career no one is going to have to worry about anything.' As far as myself, I want to see myself hold a Grand Slam, be at the top of the game. That's what everyone wants." ♦

TOP: JAHI CHIKWENDIU / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY; BOTTOM: VAUGHN RIDLEY / GETTY

# Singapore Sparkle

*Forget the identity politics*—Crazy Rich Asians *is old-school fun.* **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**



*Henry Golding as Nick and Constance Wu as Rachel in* Crazy Rich Asians

The producers of *Crazy Rich Asians* have cleverly deployed a strategy first used, to my knowledge, to sell *Bridesmaids* in 2011: taking a wildly commercial movie and turning it into a sociocultural *cause célèbre* before its opening. The ribald *Bridesmaids* was brilliantly spun into a breakthrough feminist work because it was an R-rated comedy toplined and written by women. It was, we were told, very important that *Bridesmaids* be the number-one movie of the weekend in order to give females a voice in comedy. That is how it became a noble moral act to see a picture in which a woman wearing a wedding dress contracts food poisoning and relieves herself in the middle of a Milwaukee street.

The same strategy was pursued successfully with the recent releases of *Wonder Woman* and *Black Panther*, which were presented to us not merely as mega-budget superhero flicks certain to garner enormous box-office receipts but as signature advances in gender and civil rights because *Wonder Woman* was directed by Patty Jenkins and *Black Panther* by the African-American Ryan Coogler. I have no problem with these efforts, but make no mistake, it's just salesmanship—no different from Benetton's working to connect its clothing line with the glories of diversity. People fall for it because there's nothing better than being told you are acting virtuously by going to a movie or buying a shirt.

*Crazy Rich Asians* is a fizzy romantic comedy of a sort we haven't seen much of in the last half-century—a Rock Hudson-Doris Day movie in which Doris is a hardworking career girl blissfully unaware that her boyfriend Rock is filthy rich. Doris goes home with Rock and learns the truth—that Rock's family and friends swim in their wealth the way Scrooge McDuck swam in his gold while also being surprisingly snobbish about their social standing. Can Doris measure up? Does she want to?

The twist here is that Doris is a Chinese-American economics professor at NYU named Rachel Chu (Constance Wu) while Rock is her university colleague Nick Young (Henry Golding), a Singaporean with a British accent. They've been dating for a year when he persuades her to come home with him for a couple of weeks because he is going to be best man at his friend's wedding. Her arrival in Singapore is preceded by an endless series of text messages whizzing from Greenwich Village to the Malay Peninsula about the mystery woman accompanying one of Asia's most eligible bachelors. By the time they arrive, everyone in Singapore knows about Rachel—but she still has no idea who Nick really is. Hijinks and heartbreaks and family dramas ensue.

*Crazy Rich Asians* is irresistible junk. Its premise is unbelievable—how could Rachel Chu fail, in 2018, to have googled her new boyfriend?—but cute. And its portrait of the obscenely materialistic culture in which Nick's family is a leading light is both fond and cartoonish. The wonderful direction by Jon M. Chu luxuriates in the trappings of wealth the same way the crazy rich Asians of the title do. It's a fun, knowing, but essentially idea-free movie about absolutely nothing, and I loved it.

To be honest, though, I loved Kevin Kwan's novel of the same name, published in 2013, even more; it's funnier, cleverer, while being even more lubriciously devoted to the brand-name-obsessed culture it's supposedly parodying than the movie.

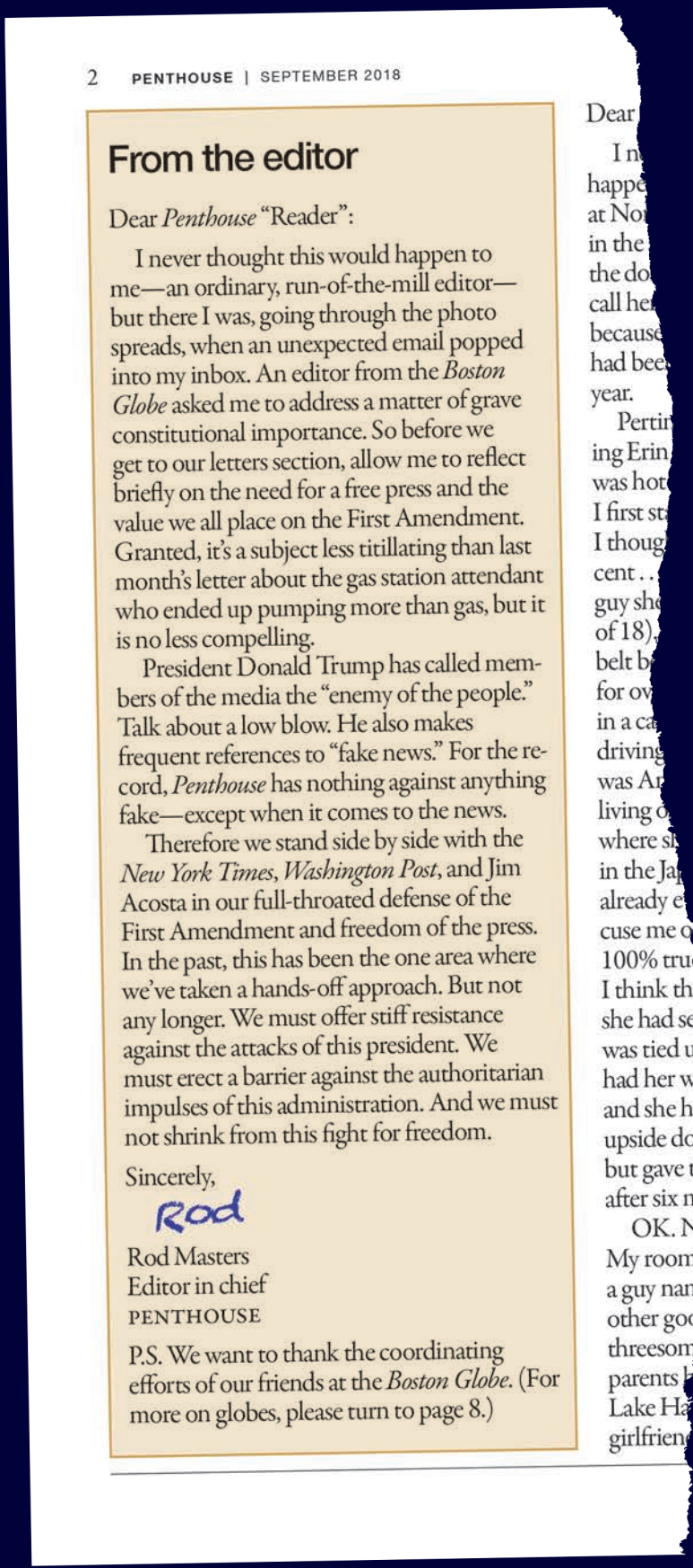
But let's be clear about this: *Crazy Rich Asians* is a beautifully constructed rom-com with a gloriously interesting new setting. It's no landmark moment for Asian-American culture. If anything, it offers a paper-thin depiction of Asian life that veers perilously close to both misogyny and cultural condescension. I give it a pass on these fronts because it's a comedy and comedies are about people behaving badly. What really amuses me, though, is that woke people who take offense at everything are giving this one a pass—or even participating in the marketing effort to make it a must-see because it checks off various identity-politics boxes. ♦

WARNER BROS.

*John Podhoretz, editor of* Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

***"More than 300 news publications across the United States have committed to a Boston Globe-coordinated effort to run editorials Thursday promoting the freedom of the press, in light of President Trump's frequent attacks on the media. . . . The list ranges from large metropolitan dailies to small weekly papers with circulations as low as 4,000."***

**—Boston Globe, August 14, 2018**



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## From the editor

Dear *Penthouse* "Reader":

I never thought this would happen to me—an ordinary, run-of-the-mill editor—but there I was, going through the photo spreads, when an unexpected email popped into my inbox. An editor from the *Boston Globe* asked me to address a matter of grave constitutional importance. So before we get to our letters section, allow me to reflect briefly on the need for a free press and the value we all place on the First Amendment. Granted, it's a subject less titillating than last month's letter about the gas station attendant who ended up pumping more than gas, but it is no less compelling.

President Donald Trump has called members of the media the "enemy of the people." Talk about a low blow. He also makes frequent references to "fake news." For the record, *Penthouse* has nothing against anything fake—except when it comes to the news.

Therefore we stand side by side with the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and Jim Acosta in our full-throated defense of the First Amendment and freedom of the press. In the past, this has been the one area where we've taken a hands-off approach. But not any longer. We must offer stiff resistance against the attacks of this president. We must erect a barrier against the authoritarian impulses of this administration. And we must not shrink from this fight for freedom.

Sincerely,

Rod

Rod Masters
Editor in chief
PENTHOUSE

P.S. We want to thank the coordinating efforts of our friends at the *Boston Globe*. (For more on globes, please turn to page 8.)

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